Commentary

Volume Seventy-one, Number Two, February 1981

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Commentary

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Letters from Readers

The Persian Gulf

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Robert W. Tucker's "American Power & the Persian Gulf" [November 1980] is as important as it is timely. It should serve to inform the judgment of the Reagan advisers who will fashion a new Middle East policy to replace the Carter policy now in disarray. In his article, Mr. Tucker has dispelled some myths, brushed aside irrelevancies, and exposed the wishful thinking which has obstructed the path to a rational policy that would serve our vital national interest in that area.

Mr. Tucker has also revealed the hollowness of the Carter administration's obsession with the Palestinian issue and a "comprehensive settlement." As Mr. Tucker says: "No conceivable settlement of the Palestinian issue would materially affect the aspirations of Iraq, the continuing storm in Iran, or the deeper causes of instability in Saudi Arabia. The major internal threats to Western access to the oil supplies of the Gulf would therefore remain—nor would it deter the Soviets from taking such action as they might take in the absence of a settlement."

The policies now in effect have brought us to a sorry pass of servility, obsequiousness, and impotence. By pandering to Arab "sensibilities" we have only whetted their demands upon us, demands which are often arbitrary and capricious. . . .

Mr. Tucker concludes that "the center of gravity of American interests in the world today is not to be found in Europe but in the Persian Gulf."

The centrality of America's vital interests in the Middle East has been evident for many years. And so has the need to protect those interests. On June 8, 1978, in an Op-Ed article in the New York *Times*, Thomas H. Moorer, a retired admiral and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from July 1970 to July 1974, pointed to the threat to Mideast oil supplies from internal disturbances and, more likely, from Soviet machinations. . . . But Admiral Moorer's only solution was that we should obtain the consent of Iran and Saudi Arabia to deploy two carrier forces in the Arabian Sea and to attempt to "revitalize the bilateral security agreement of 1959 with Iran and explore the possibility of similar bilateral arrangements with Saudi Arabia."

In November 1978, a group of over 170 retired admirals and generals wrote to President Carter and, going much further than Admiral Moorer, they advised the U.S. to look to Israel for the protection of American interests in the Middle East. . . . They told President Carter that "at this stage, no other society in the area could be counted on to mobilize reliable, battle-tested ground and air units, or make available service access points. *In brief, if not for the proven capability of the Israeli armed forces, we would be forced now to station a significant number of men and substantial materiel in that region*" (emphasis added).

Admiral Moorer and the 170 generals and admirals pointed to the strategic gap, but were apparently determined to fill it principally by deploying two carrier forces in the Arabian sea and by looking to Israel for the protection of America's vital interests in the area.

In three letters published by the New York *Times* (June 9, 1978, November 27, 1978, and December 4, 1979), I urged a defense built on a combination of American, Israeli, Iranian, and Arab forces:

- The United States [should] construct a port on the Israeli coast, in the meantime using Haifa and Eilat. It [should] create air bases and depots in the Negev, in the Sinai, and in Saudi Arabia, using Israel's existing facilities until that infrastructure is in place (June 9, 1978).

- General Keegan, after inspecting the Israeli air force base at Etzion in the Sinai, reported that it was the best equipped, most modern, and most powerful in the world. . . . Unfortunately, it is contemplated that this base and others be demilitarized and turned over to Egypt for civilian air fields. . . . These bases, and the new one now being built by us for Saudi Arabia, when placed under U.S. operation and control, can be an indispensable counterforce to Soviet power in the surrounding area. . . (November 27, 1978).

- . . . a lease of the Sinai bases to the U.S. by Egypt, together with the

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use of Israeli ports, workshops, and marshaling areas, should not only serve our strategic need to protect the area, support the Sixth Fleet, and monitor the Persian Gulf, but should prove a stabilizing force in the whole area (December 4, 1979). . . .

Mr. Tucker has now come around to the view that we must act in defense of our vital interests. . . . He urges the leasing by the U.S. of the air bases at Eitam and Etzion in the Sinai which Israel will turn over to Egypt in 1982. He foresees some difficulties with Egypt's sensibilities and with those of other Arab nations and, therefore, proposes that the U.S. occupy those bases under the guise of the security forces contemplated in the Israeli-Egyptian Camp David accords. He could have spared himself all of the maneuvering to save Egyptian feelings because the Egyptian government has refused to enter into such a lease.

The New York *Times* reports, under a Cairo dispatch dated November 11: "President Sadat has offered the United States air and naval 'facilities,' but no permanent bases, to help any *Arab or Islamic nation* that faces aggression and requests American military help" (emphasis added). "The Egyptians have said they do not want a written agreement stipulating that the facilities are at the disposal of the United States for a specific period. Such a document would be appropriate for a base agreement, whereas a 'facility' is being offered under a gentlemen's agreement for emergency use." . . .

Inasmuch as the Sinai bases are not to be turned over until 1982, why not enter a lease with Israel now? We should first insure long-term occupancy, without the limits imposed by Egypt, by getting Israel and Egypt to extend the time when those bases must be turned over to Egypt from 1982 until, say, the year 2000.

Since Egypt wants at least $500 million a year in military aid now, the extension of the turnover would be a reasonable *quid pro quo*. A refusal to do so would provide an early test of Egypt's reliability as a "full partner."

There remains the question of providing an adequate ground and air force. The Rapid Deployment Force is too small and will take too long to provide the countervailing force now required in the area.

Why not redeploy the forces we now have in Europe? Three or four divisions could be dispatched to Israel and the Sinai. Although that force may be seen as only a trigger force, it is adequate (supported, of course, by Israel) to deal with any Arab force. It would be a trigger force only in the face of a large, direct Soviet incursion into the area. But then the American force in West Germany is so inferior to the Warsaw Pact forces, that it, too, serves only as a trigger force. In either event, the ultimate appeal is to nuclear and not to conventional arms.

Mr. Tucker will have rendered a singular service to the country if he lets our foreign policy-makers understand that by attempting to curry favor with the Gulf oil producers we only earn their contempt. I say this more in hope than out of conviction because there is no visible evidence that our decision-makers heard Norman Podhoretz's clarion call last March ("The Present Danger") or paid any heed to the following remarkable series of articles in COMMENTARY by Walter Laqueur ("Euro-Neutralism," June 1980), Carl Gershman ("The Rise & Fall of the New Foreign-Policy Establishment, July 1980), and Edward N. Luttwak ("A New Arms Race?" September 1980).

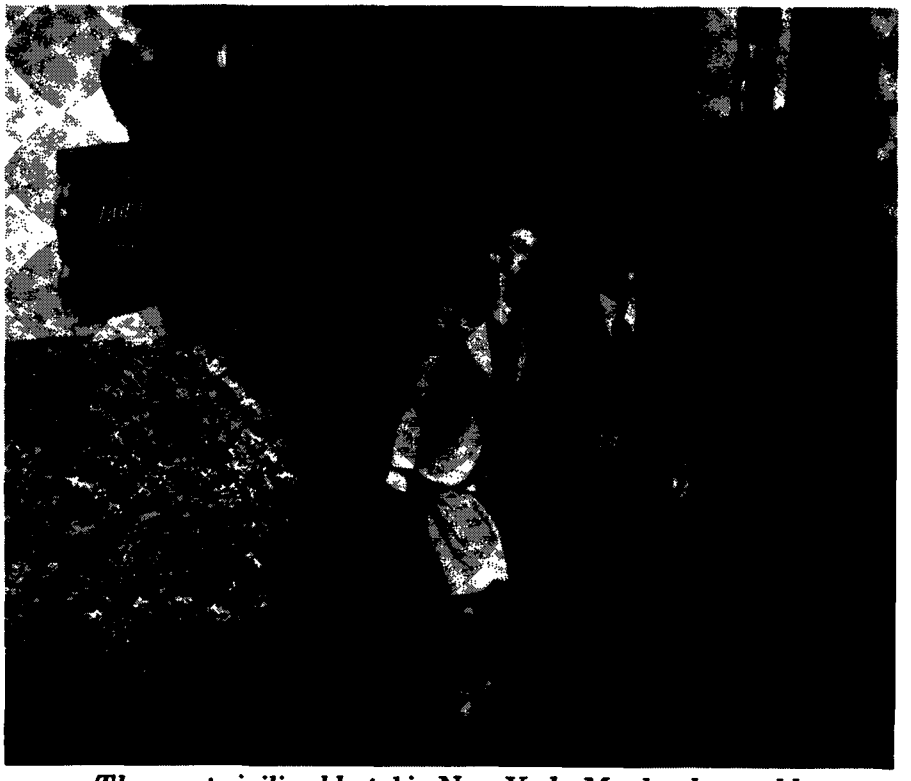
There appears to be no general awareness in the foreign-policy community, in the press, or in academia that we are in a crisis which may result in the loss of our liberties as a free nation unless we act soon with courage and resolution.

There is a clear and present danger. All that is required is our determination to meet it. We must fashion a new Middle East policy and act to avert disaster without delay.

M. H. BLINKEN
Palm Beach, Florida

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Robert W. Tucker's excellent article, "American Power & the Persian Gulf," and in particular his references to Stanley Hoffmann's views of U.S. foreign policy,



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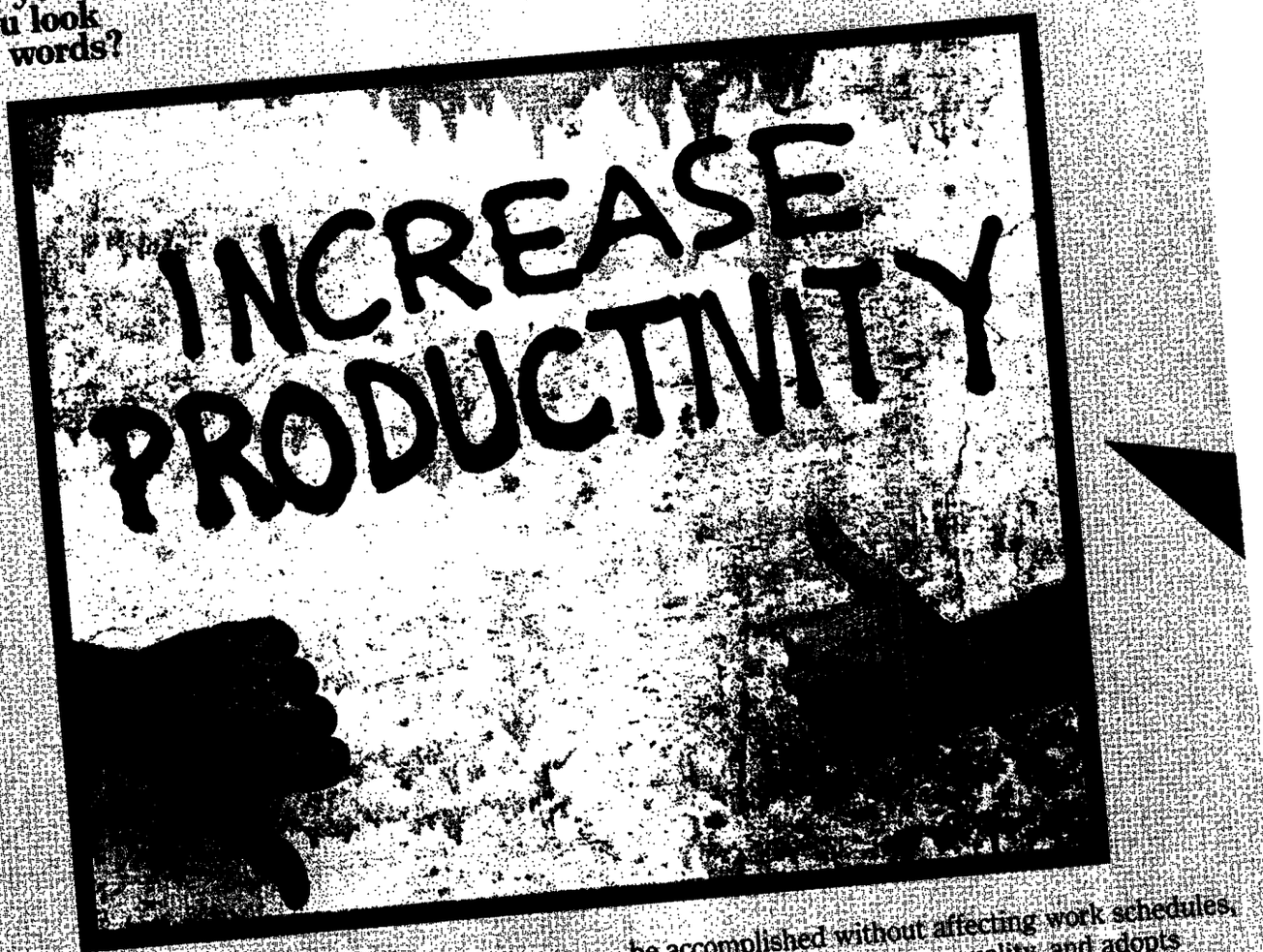

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prompt me to propose that the line of thinking represented by Hoffmann (and others like Marshall Shulman, Richard J. Barnet, etc.) be identified as the "therapeutic school of appeasement."

I suggest this because when all the complex, obfuscating verbiage is removed from Hoffmann's argument, what remains is the hope that appeasement will yield security and good will on the part of the aggressor once he has been convinced that his hostility is groundless by repeated demonstrations of good will (read, concessions). Such hopes are, in turn, based on the depiction (and perception) of Soviet motivation as one of childlike insecurity which must be catered to by understanding, by friendly reaching-out, and by compassion. Hoffmann and company fail to realize (or admit) that insecurity and aggression are inextricably intertwined and that insecurity of the type the Soviet leadership is supposed to suffer from is not rational and hence cannot be appeased—certainly not by the attitudes and policies Hoffmann advocates.

PAUL HOLLANDER
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In his latest assessment of the American position in the Middle East, Robert W. Tucker repeats a mistake which, though apparently minor, has bedeviled American preparedness since World War II. Following what has become a conventional pattern for most analysts, he defines American capability, at least in part, in terms of our ability to airlift a given-size military force within a specified time period.

Since the onset of glamorous but largely useless paratroopers in World War II, the need for airlift has been defined in terms of what is required to move entire airborne divisions into combat areas, then simultaneously airdrop them into battle. Not only does this become a "one-trip strategy," but it also requires specially designed aircraft and highly skilled crews. This might be worth the cost if there were any evidence that large-scale airborne assaults ever had accomplished anything, but, aside from putting on airshows for VIP's, they have not.

Assuming it is feasible to conduct a substantial conventional war (though the oil situation might make this no longer possible),

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troops can be flown to forward areas just as they were during the Vietnam war—by a combination of military aircraft and airliners. For the foreseeable future, there will be a lot of unused airliners sitting around, which can be easily put to work flying troops to staging areas. The notion that this function can be performed only by military aircraft and pilots is as nonsensical as it always has been. The only highly specialized requirement is for "outsized" cargo, and military aircraft such as the C-5 may be needed for this purpose—but not for airdropping thousands of paratroopers.

FREDERICK C. THAYER
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

As in 1975, with his COMMENTARY article, "Oil: The Issue of American Intervention," I find myself agreeing with Robert W. Tucker about the need to buttress our "vital interests" in the Persian Gulf by creating credible military options there. But, also, I find myself again at issue with him about the appropriate instrumentalities for military action in the Persian Gulf, if we are driven to drastic action. . . .

We must consider Soviet actions in the Persian Gulf, at every stage, as well as actions by fanatical religious elements. Much as I agree with Mr. Tucker's analysis, I worry more than he does about posing a "nuclear threat." Thus I agree with Paul Nitze and Albert Wohlstetter, not with Mr. Tucker, on this vital point. As Mr. Tucker says, "A tripwire policy in the Gulf cannot be expected to carry greater persuasiveness than it does in Europe." Surely it carries less persuasiveness, given the depth of our historical common commitment to NATO, our complex of bases and related infrastructure, our sizable forces there, a common command, and closer proximity to the United States. And even in NATO, a policy of "flexible response" was not adopted until December 1967, despite U.S. efforts to secure such a new strategic concept that began early in 1961. And because we were weary of the doctrinal debate, and preoccupied with Vietnam, we settled then for an unsatisfactory alliance version of "flexible response." The NATO version was adopted by our allies because, somehow, our "nuclear capabilities" were still supposed to lessen the economic cost of conventional arms in the 1980's as well as the 1960's. That invalid argument is justly criticized by Mr. Tucker, who wants to anchor our Middle East defense upon a firm foundation of conventional strength.

Is not our thirty-five-year-old tradition against using nuclear weapons so valuable that we should treasure it until and unless forced, by truly compelling circumstances, to break it? And can we possibly claim now to be better able to fight a nuclear war around the Persian Gulf than can the Soviets? Where are our SS-20 missiles, Backfire bombers, and aerospace defenses? If we had listened more to Nitze and Wohlstetter in the 1950's and 1960's, rather than to their critics, we might now have a military posture which would lend essential credibility to Mr. Tucker's view.

One can, to be sure, multiply near-endless scenarios about crises in and around the Persian Gulf. But even if we must use force, modern non-nuclear munitions, precisely aimed at enemy "choke points," or economic targeting may be effective enough in an area where transport facilities are limited. If they are not, would replacement by nuclear attacks, on balance, be a good idea? What would then happen to the Eitam and Etzion bases that Mr. Tucker, quite properly, wants to use? The Soviets could easily destroy them.

We do and must maintain a credible nuclear umbrella for our allies, and we are improving it. I have elsewhere criticized Henry Kissinger's technical errors in his famous speech in Brussels on September 1, 1979, which led him . . . to understate the validity of our nuclear umbrella. Further, we could be driven to use nuclear weapons in some extreme circumstances in the Middle East precisely because the invalid argument that "nuclear weapons" save money has been abused. Our conventional capabilities have not been properly maintained for fifteen years, and we must live with the dangerous consequences of their neglect as best we can. We do share with our allies truly global "vital interests" in the Persian Gulf, and the point to stress is that the views held in common by Nitze, Tucker, and Wohlstetter should command great assent. They certainly command mine.

After all, Nitze was the main author of the famous NSC-68 Strategic Reassessment of 1950, and that document sought the proper goal of "flexible response": namely, the attainment of conventional capabilities that would enable us "to attain our objectives without war, or, in the event of war, without recourse to the use of atomic weapons for strategic or tactical purposes." Are not wise "owls" of the present more likely to come from the ranks of those who have been called the "hawks" rather than from the "doves"?

M. W. HOAG
The Rand Corporation
Santa Monica, California

ROBERT W. TUCKER writes:

In response to M. H. Blinken, I can only say that if the Sinai bases can be leased through the method he proposes, I am all in favor of it. Whether Sadat would agree to his solution is another matter. His proposal that we take the forces we now have in Europe and redeploy them in the Sinai is also another matter. This measure would almost certainly create a first-class crisis in our relations with the West Germans. When added to the strains which are already there, the result would be a rupture which would serve only the interests of the Soviet Union.

I cannot respond seriously to the point made my Frederick C. Thayer since I lack the expertise to do so. In any event, I can scarcely be accused of having placed much emphasis on airlift capability as a solution to our strategic problems in the Middle East.

M. W. Hoag's thoughtful letter raises issues that simply do not lend themselves to definitive answers. The reader should not misapprehend our differences. They are not of an "either/or" but of a "more-or-less" kind. Mr. Hoag thinks I should worry more about posing a nuclear threat. I think I worry a great deal as it is. The critical consideration is that *at some point* the threat is inescapable. The question, then, is, at what point? I quite agree with Mr. Hoag that this point should be as far removed as is possible and that if it is to be very far removed there is no alternative but to attain the conventional capabilities for which he has so eloquently argued.

Yiddish

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Permit me to comment on Lucy S. Dawidowicz's article, "The Rise and Fall of Yiddish" [November

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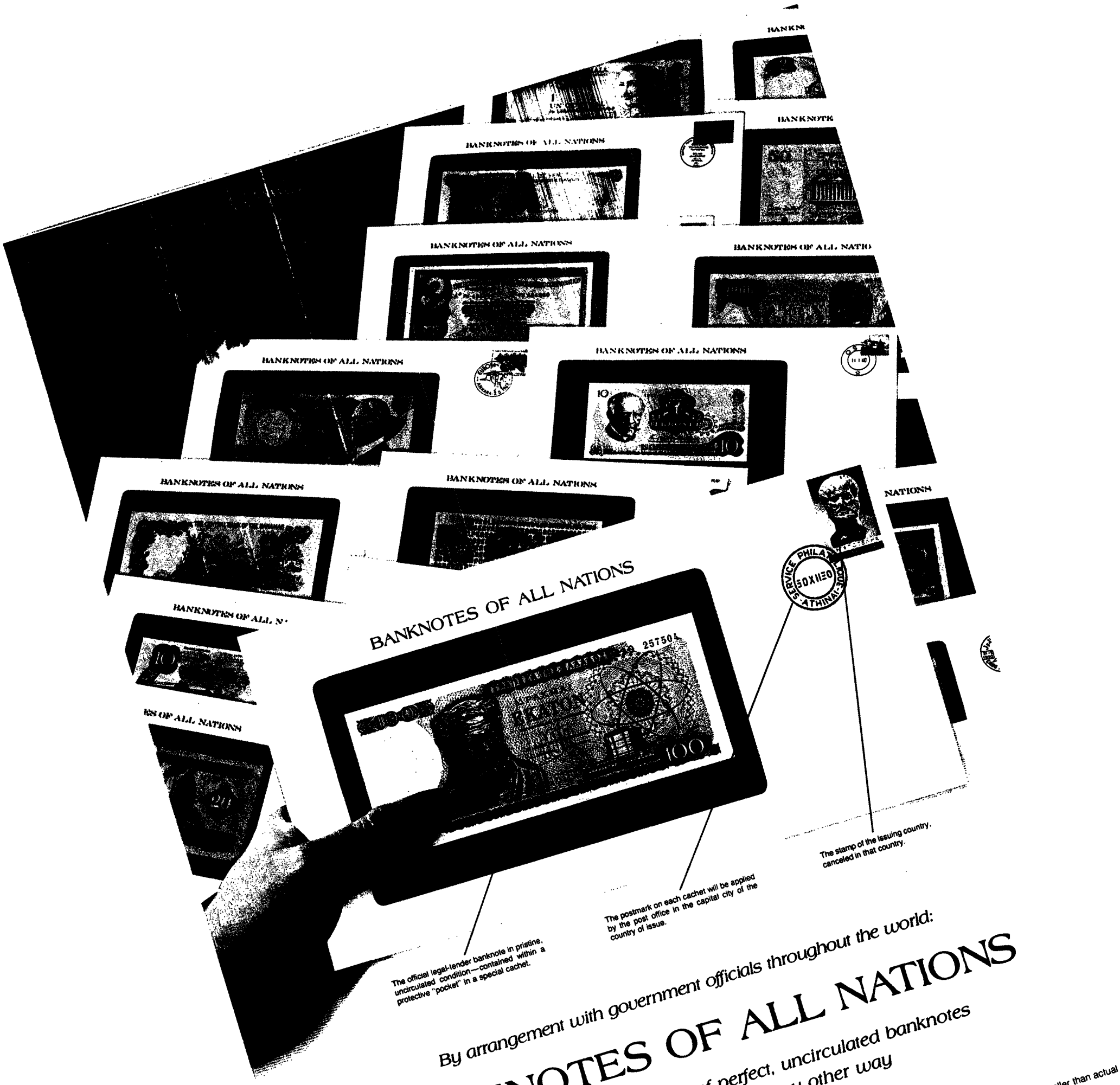
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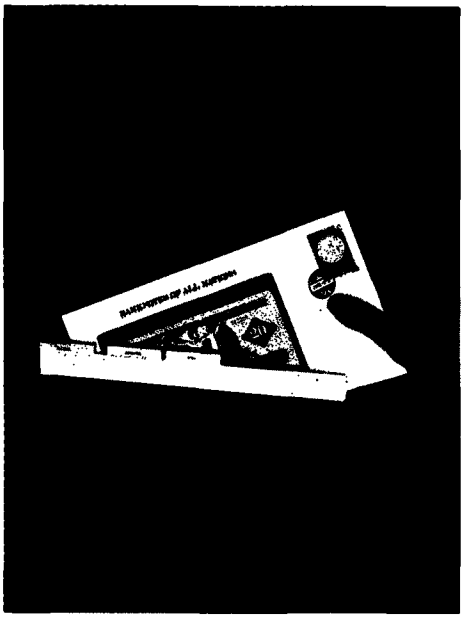

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1980], in which she gives a commendable analysis and exposition of Max Weinreich's monumental *History of the Yiddish Language*. Her closing statements, however, are not in agreement with Weinreich, nor did Weinreich venture to suggest in his work a prognosis of the "fall" or the "end of the era" of Yiddish. A juxtaposition of a few of Mrs. Dawidowicz's closing remarks with Weinreich's statements will reveal these dissimilarities.

Mrs. Dawidowicz: "Once an organic community, indivisible as a people and a religion, the Jews were split apart by religious and class wars, and became estranged from one another by new national loyalties." "In the remarkable success of Yiddish as a secular vehicle lay the seeds of its decline." "Evidence is in any case at hand that Yiddish began to decline somewhat after it became a secular language and after its function as a vehicle for *yidishkayt* was reduced."

Weinreich, on the contrary, indicates several times the strengthening of Yiddish by the transformed socioeconomic differentiation of the community, by the conflicts between the hasidic and mitnagdic sectors, by the growing influence of secularism: "Not only did the traditional and the secular sectors coexist, but there were also many intermediary groups." "The rings holding the community did not break asunder." "In the interbellum period Agudists, Mizrachists, Folkists, Zionists, Poale-Zionists, Bundists, non-partisans . . . sat at one table in the Jewish communities in Poland. There were constant quarrels, but the people as a whole became welded more closely. The *oylemshe yidn* (this term that had its origin apparently some time in the 19th century, designated not necessarily anti-traditional Jews, but in general 'the modern') were accepted as another variant to the many variants that Ashkenaz had had from before. The amplitude of Jewish pluralism became still broader." "The Ashkenazic community in Eastern Europe emerged strengthened even from these bitter fights, with which Jewish cultural history in the 19th and 20th centuries is replete, and the Yiddish language came out enriched." "The community was highly differentiated as to its social stratification and in its cultural aspiration . . . the struggle did not disrupt the community, it cemented it."

Mrs. Dawidowicz, in her summation, claims that "the secular Yiddish press, the secular Yiddish schools, and modern Yiddish literature hastened rather than retarded the acculturation of the Jews to modern urban Gentile society." On the contrary, the Yiddish press, Yiddish literature, theater, and culture, which incidentally once was Mrs. Dawidowicz's own environment, acted as a bulwark against complete acculturation and helped in the preservation of ethnic heritage. Is it not true that in countries like Germany and France, where secular Yiddish culture did not play a role as an influential medium, it was the religious German and French Jews who styled themselves Germans or French, respectively, of the "Mosaic persuasion" who became so rapidly acculturated and assimilated?

An error on Mrs. Dawidowicz's part should be rectified here. She disparages the rendering of Weinreich's use of the term "*yidishkayt*" as "Jewishness" by the translator, the eminent scholar Shlomo Noble. However, Weinreich himself used this term in an earlier essay (in English), "The Reality of Jewishness versus the Ghetto Myth: The Sociolinguistic Roots of Yiddish," in the jubilee volume *To Honor Roman Jakobson* (The Hague-Paris, 1967).

Mrs. Dawidowicz's final remarks, namely, that language loyalty is artificial and sentimental, and that Yiddish has lost its function as a vehicle of systematic communication are also questionable. While it is true that the numerical strength of Yiddish-speakers has declined and the manifestations of Yiddish may have assumed different forms, love for the Yiddish language and culture is still very strong among thousands of Jews in this and other countries. Yiddish has continued to maintain its strong emotional hold as it did in previous eras. Nor is there anything artificial, or anything wrong, with a sentimental attachment to it. Fifty thousand Jews attended the Workmen's Circle Yiddish Festivals during this past summer in New York City alone, with many more thousands in other cities in the United States. Tens of thousands attend Yiddish theaters—this year there are four in New York—read the Yiddish press, partake of Yiddish cultural events. In the realm of Yiddish literature, we can point with pride to the important Yiddish quarterly, *Di Goldene Keyt*, edited by Abraham Sutzkever in Israel; the Yiddish monthly *Di Tsukunft* in New York; the works of two New York Yiddish novelists, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Chaim Grade. In his time, Weinreich was gratified that a few colleges had introduced courses in Yiddish—today over 60 colleges and universities are teaching Yiddish in this country, in addition to the Max Weinreich Graduate Center at YIVO. Why, then, Mrs. Dawidowicz's haste to recite *kaddish*?

One more word about Shlomo Noble, whose achievement as translator almost matches the author's. His style and erudition, evinced in the copious specimens and sources of Yiddish from the 13th to 20th centuries; his intimacy with middle-high German, German dialects, the Czech, Polish, and Russian languages; his knowledge of ancient Hebrew, modern Hebrew, and *Ivrit* in Israel; his familiarity with Aramaic, Dzhudezmo, Ladino, the Old French and Italian Jewish languages and the concomitant vernaculars where Jews resided—all this is a truly breathtaking accomplishment. . . . His faithful adherence to Weinreich's masterful Yiddish text assures his own immortality and makes his work a milestone in our era.

JOSEPH MLOTEK
Education Director
The Workmen's Circle
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I wonder how many of us have gone so far as to give way to the dybbuk of linguistic matricide by declaring, as does Lucy S. Dawidowicz, that Yiddish "instead of being a living spoken language . . . has reached the end of its era"?

Surely this will come as quite a surprise to the many loyal readers of the Yiddish-language press, not to mention the thousands upon thousands of ultra-Orthodox parents throughout the world who continue to speak Yiddish with their children in their homes.

And what about the Yiddish theater—bigger and better than ever this year? And the many outstanding Yiddish writers who publish their work on a regular basis? The ones I know personally do not appear to have reached the end of their era. On the contrary, they show every sign of surviving their detractors.

I do not see any justification for

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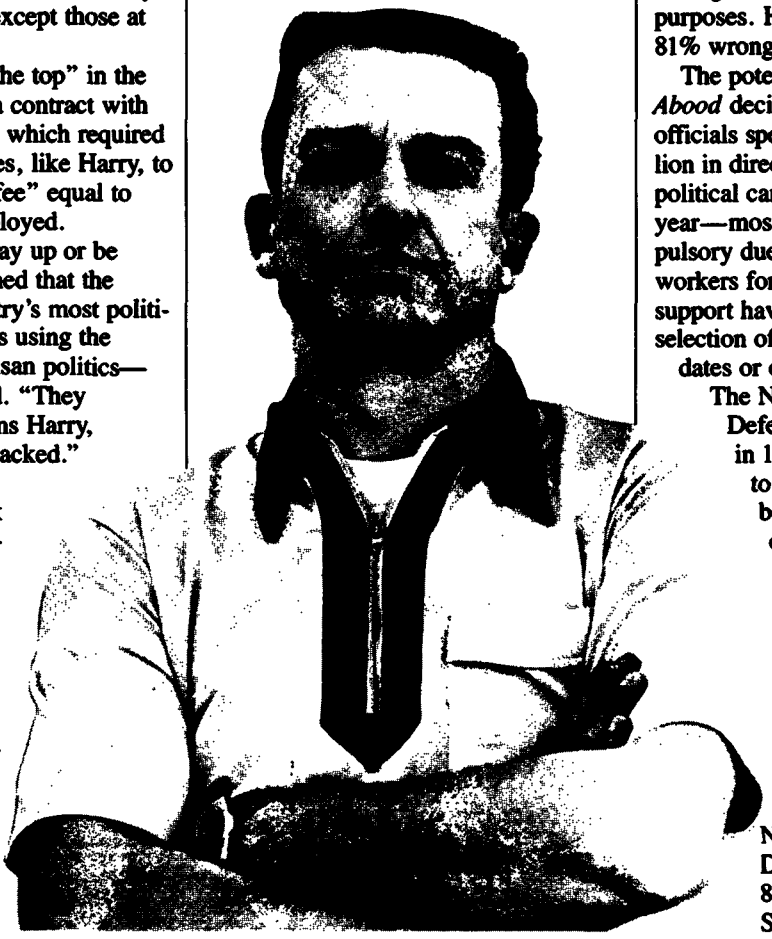

The Beck case acquired added significance in August 1980 when a Special Master, appointed by the court, found that the CWA had spent only 19% of the union's total dues income for legitimate collective bargaining purposes. He recommended that the 81% wrongly spent be refunded.

The potential impact of the *Beck* and *Abood* decisions is enormous. Union officials spend an estimated $100 million in direct and "in-kind" support on political campaigns in a single election year—most of it raised through compulsory dues or "agency fees." The workers forced to pay for this political support have rarely any voice in the selection of the union favored candidates or causes.

The National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, established in 1968, provides free legal aid to workers whose rights have been violated as a result of compulsory unionism. It is presently supporting more than 100 court cases involving the rights of employees across the nation.

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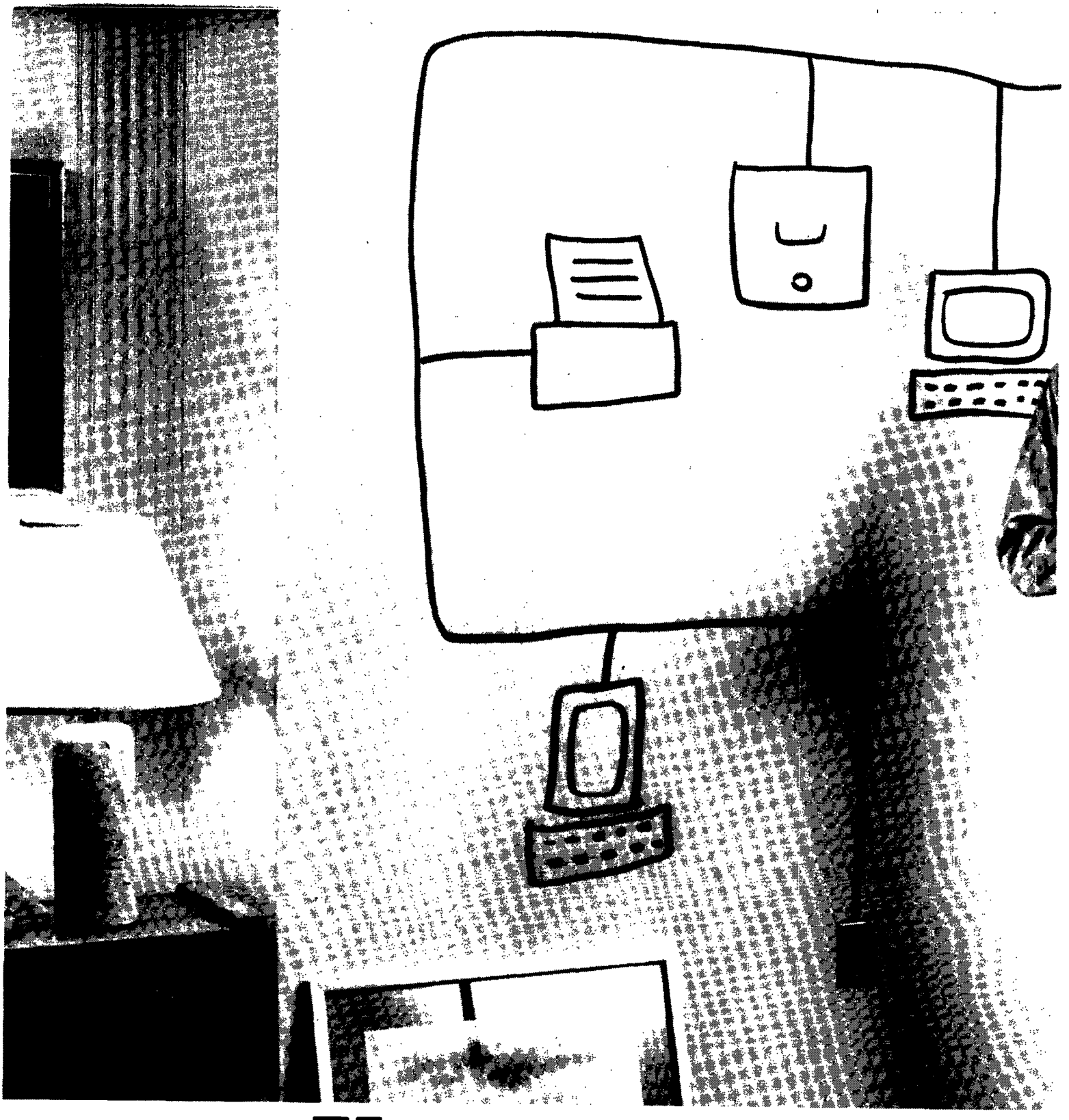

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making gratuitous remarks about spoken and written Yiddish when the very same energies could be redirected toward formulating programs for keeping the values of *yidishkayt* alive and well in the hearts and minds of our children and grandchildren. . . .

KENNETH LIBO
English Section Editor
Jewish Daily Forward
New York City

LUCY S. DAWIDOWICZ writes:

Denying the bitter reality doesn't change that reality. My analysis of the rise and fall of Yiddish is, I believe, historically valid. Magical incantations ("Say it isn't so") can't and won't undo the course of events as they happened, and as I described them. I had hoped that my critics who were my friends would have understood that, but, as I anticipated, they didn't.

The late John Dollard, of Yale University, whom I met once because he was a friend of the late Max Weinreich, wrote in his classic book, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town:* "Candid analysis cannot be combined with friendship either in life or social studies."

Joseph and His Brothers

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

It is a pleasure to acknowledge another of Robert Alter's splendid contributions to the literary analysis and appreciation of the Bible ["Joseph and His Brothers," November 1980]. His emphasis on key words as thematic devices deserves constant reiteration. May I, therefore, call attention to another term whose sevenfold use gives the Joseph story a special dimension?

When the famine becomes severe in Canaan, Jacob charges his sons to go to Egypt to procure *shebher*, food (Genesis 42:1). The usual word for food is *lehem*, and the use of *shebher* would be no more than a stylistic variation were it not for the fact that it occurs another six times in the story and only twice more in the whole Bible (Amos 8:5; Nehemiah 10:32). The multiple occurrence of *shebher* in the Joseph tale must therefore be considered purposeful. But what is it that the text means to convey with this special term? The commentators are silent on the matter, but the Midrash (Genesis Rabba 91:1) suggests that instead of reading *shebher*, food, one ought to read *sebher*, hope. Jacob is understood to prophesy that while the brothers will seek food in Egypt they will in fact also fetch hope.

This Midrash turns out to be more than a post-biblical play on words; it exposes in fact the tale's literary finesse. For when the Ephraimites retold the story of their ancestor they did so with their well-known linguistic deficiency: unable to pronounce a *sh* they said *s*. We know this from the Book of Judges which relates how the Ephraimites revealed their identity. When pressed to say *shibboleth* they could only manage to say *sibboleth* (12:6). On their tongues *shebher* and *sebher* were one and the same, and therefore the Joseph story introduces the rare word and uses it time and again. Picture the scene: The story teller comes to the point where the plot thickens. The erstwhile slave has become viceroy and the famine in Canaan forces his father to seek succor in Egypt. Bring us bread, Jacob says, but in effect he also commands the brothers to fetch hope. The hearer already knows what Jacob doesn't, that the journey will betoken more than the obtaining of provender. The double meaning, repeated again and again, puts its stamp on the unfolding events.

There are other aspects to the literary construction of these chapters. To name one more: the pervasive use of numbers is evident in the Joseph tale as elsewhere in the narrative portions of the Bible. Thus, when Jacob arrives in Egypt and stands before Pharaoh he gives his age as 130 years. Just as Joseph was for 17 years his father's ward (until he was sold into slavery), so Jacob will spend the remaining 17 years of his life as the pensioner of his son, a balance that did not escape the ancient hearer, whose ear was attuned to such matters.

Of the same genre is the balance between Joseph and Joshua. Joseph is the man who takes his people out of the Promised Land, and Joshua will take them back. Both will live to 110. This figure has a special significance for it relates intimately to the patriarchal cycle. Abraham lived 175 years (7×5^2), Isaac 180 years (5×6^2), and Jacob 147 years (3×7^2). The three lives point toward Joseph who incorporates their essence, for his life span of 110 equals $5^2 + 6^2 + 7.^2$ What the Bible tells us—and

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what the ancient hearers well understood—was that the rise of God's people had all the earmarks of divine providence.

[Rabbi] W. GUNTHER PLAUT
Toronto, Ontario

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

My compliments to Robert Alter for his perspicacious treatment of the story of Joseph and his brothers, truly a great saga, as Thomas Mann also indicated in his books on that theme. Allow me an addendum to Mr. Alter's observations on Joseph's weeping.

As Mr. Alter writes, Joseph weeps several times: when he sees his brothers, when he gets a look at Benjamin, and when he identifies himself. But Joseph weeps still another time. In Genesis 50 his brothers come to him after the death of their father, Jacob, and fabricate a story to the effect that their father left word with Joseph not to punish his brothers for having sold him into slavery. Obviously, their guilt feelings prompt this act. At that (Genesis 50:17), Joseph again breaks out in tears. Then he delivers one of the most sublime utterances in all literature. He "comforts his brothers," telling them that it was not they, but God who was responsible for his mission in Egypt where he was able to save many lives.

So noble is this example of forgiveness that I often read it on Yom Kippur instead of the Torah passage assigned in our tradition. Yom Kippur is for forgiveness, and Joseph's readiness to forgive is eternally inspiring.

[Rabbi] SAMUEL M. SILVER
Delray Beach, Florida

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I always enjoy Robert Alter's brilliant essays on biblical writing and I write now to compliment him as well as to add some remarks of my own. I had always believed that biblical authors shunned the formalities of narrative art except for the lyricism of language and other poetic qualities. But thanks to Mr. Alter, I now see that I have been the beneficiary of the seeming artlessness of great art. Yet in two aspects biblical literature seems distinct from any other literature of its time and confirms for me that the stories are not mere legend. Most obvious, but little commented upon, is the choice of heroes: shepherds, herdsmen, nomads, as opposed to kings, warriors, gods or

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godlike men, and the usual "establishment" types of the ancient world. In that day, herdsmen and working people were the despised of mankind. Yet in every instance, Ishmael versus Isaac, Esau versus Jacob, the herdsman is chosen over the fierce warrior or man of strength. . . .

Second, and less obvious, is the almost complete shunning of physical descriptions of the heroes in biblical narrative. One of the standard rules of fiction is that it is the telling physical detail that gives "believablity." We find examples in the writings of Homer and other ancients.

That the Hebrew writers avoided such an obvious fictional device can no doubt be explained theologically, but again, no inherent need existed for such an omission. I have sometimes thought that the Bible could be read as part newspaper and part historical record. The actions of important characters are carefully described but not their physical characteristics. Is it assumed that everyone knows that they are real? It is only in dramatizing and "fictionalizing" news journals that writers play with "telling physical details." Compare *Time* with COMMENTARY. . . .

Thanks again, Mr. Alter, for a delightful and thought-provoking experience.

MAURICE SCHMIDT
Kingsville, Texas

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I read Robert Alter's article with a great deal of interest. I do not claim to be a specialist in the field of literary theory or a biblical scholar. But since Mr. Alter in an earlier article, "A Literary Approach to the Bible" [December 1975], criticized a literary scholar because of his apparent insufficiency in the Hebrew language and because in the present article the author makes only one very brief reference to a classical Hebrew exegete (Rashi), I feel that the following comments are very much in order.

Even according to rabbinic tradition, the Bible has numerous interpretations—the words of the Torah are like a hammer that shatters stones into many pieces. But except for the two sexual references and interpretation that Mr. Alter offers —the use of the term nakedness and the story of Reuben and Bilhah—I believe that almost every interpretation and insight provided by the author has already been suggested by the so-called classical Jewish commentators of the past thousand years.

It might be of interest to note that the Midrash interprets the use of the word "nakedness" to mean that Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt and began searching for him in the "red-light district," on the assumption that he had been sold there as a slave because of his great physical beauty. The incident of Reuben and Bilhah is in rabbinic tradition never interpreted as referring to sexual relations between the two but as an attempt by Reuben to change the sleeping arrangements of his father after Rachel's death.

Concerning the literary analysis of the story of Joseph and his brothers, an unusually large number of the items noted in the article can be found, and at times in very similar wording, in the commentary of the 15th-century exegete, Rabbi Isaac Abrabanel. I quote (my own translation) some examples:

I have already explained that Joseph wanted to repay his brothers measure for measure. . . . They committed three evils against him: (1) they suspected him of being a gossiper and spy and that he brought their evil sayings to their father; (2) they threw him into a pit; and (3) they handed him over to the Midianites to be a slave. . . . Thus Joseph did to them. He accused them at first of being spies . . . and arrested Simon before them and placed him under detention in the pit . . . and he commanded that Benjamin be made a slave with the accusation concerning a goblet.

Despite all the tests that Joseph made of his brothers, there was still a doubt in his mind if they loved Benjamin or if they hated the sons of Rachel, his mother. Therefore he wanted to bring Benjamin specifically into the test of the goblet to see if they would try to save him.

Despite all this, he [Joseph] was afraid that perhaps his brothers thought that it was true that Benja-

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min stole the goblet, just as his mother Rachel stole the idols from her father. And perhaps because of this they said that the person who sins should die.

So it has been explained that this whole account of the event [by Judah] was to arouse Joseph's pity for their old father. . . . Judah also brought proof from his father's words, "You know that my wife bore me two sons." He meant to say that my special wife bore me only two sons, as if all the rest of the sons were the children of concubines.

And with this the Bible ended the story that God repaid the brothers of Joseph measure for measure for all they did. . . . All that remained was to repay Judah who was the one who had advised that Joseph be sold as a slave. And therefore it was necessary that he submit himself as a slave in place of Benjamin, the son of Joseph's mother. And with that, complete retribution was made.

And because they sold him, it was proper that he [Joseph] would believe that he would be their enemy because of the evil they did to him. He had to say to them: now do not be sad and be not angry that you sold me here. He did not mean that they should not be sad that they sold him, but that a person should feel bad only when evil results from his actions, not when good results. He then explained how what they did had good results since there were still five years of hunger to come.

What is additionally disturbing in the article are Mr. Alter's constant references to the story of Joseph as historical fiction. Perhaps the reason the classical Jewish scholars were able to reach almost identical insights about the literary genius of the Bible is that at the same time they ascribed to it divine origin.

NATHAN M. KAGANOFF
Brookline, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Though I greatly admire Robert Alter's literary analyses, I wish to point out several flaws in his article, "Joseph and His Brothers." I think the interpretations in my book, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis* (KTAV, 1973), do more justice to the text than those of Mr. Alter.

In his interpretation of Chapter 37, verses 1-5, Mr. Alter says: "Though the ten [Joseph's brothers] are quite naturally identified as 'the sons of Israel' when they arrive in Egypt, emissaries of their patriarchal father, as they set out they are called 'Joseph's brothers.'" My book, however, has the following:

> Except for two merely anticipatory historical glosses, . . . the appellation *Bene Yisrael* ["the sons of Israel"] appears here for the first time. . . . By first calling them "his [Jacob's] sons," then "Joseph's brothers," and now *Bene Yisrael*, the Torah seems to intimate the master-motif of the whole narrative. . . . The Torah shows how the Ten, "his sons," having become in truth "Joseph's brothers," will, together with Joseph and Benjamin, mature to become the germ-cell of the covenant people, *Bene Yisrael*, "the children of Israel." . . .

Joseph, thus, is the bridge between Canaan and Egypt, between Jacob and Moses. . . .

Verses 3 and 4 of Chapter 37 are translated by Mr. Alter as follows:

> 3. Then Joseph's brothers ten went down to get provisions of grain from Egypt. 4. But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob did not send with his brothers, for he thought he might meet disaster.

Mr. Alter then goes on to say: "We are told nothing of the ten brothers' response to their father's withholding of Benjamin." Mr. Alter here accepts the translation of *hu amar* as "he thought," but the literal translation is "for he said [to them]." Thus we don't need the brothers' response. And there is no "delicate play of implication in verses 3 and 4 as we move from 'Joseph's brothers' to 'Joseph's brother' and 'his [Benjamin's] brothers.'" My book explains that "Benjamin explicitly [being] called 'Joseph's brother' underlines the reasons for Jacob's fear: for Joseph perished 'on the way,' as had their mother." . . .

Mr. Alter asserts that with the brothers' prostrating themselves before the "chief provisioner" both dreams of Joseph were fulfilled. Nahmanides, erroneously, thinks that not even the first dream was fulfilled (he does not realize that Jo-

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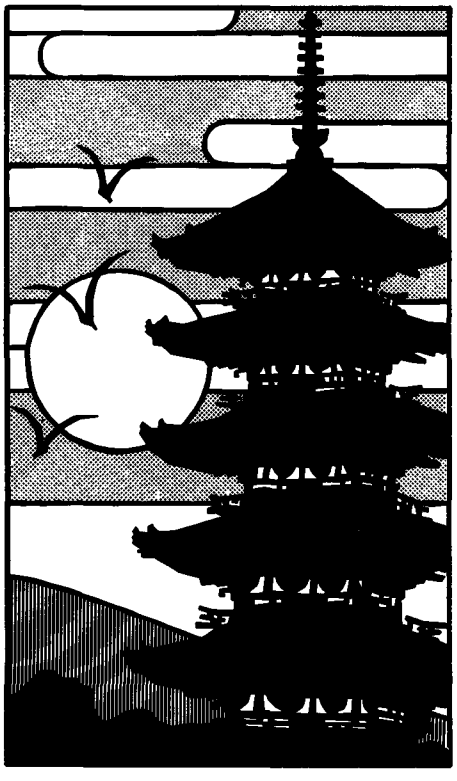

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seph's first dream does not mention the number of sheaves). But Mr. Alter also errs: only the second dream mentions "eleven," besides the sun and the moon. Only ten prostrated themselves before the viceroy. . . .

Three times Mr. Alter states that the brothers sold Joseph. By now modern scholars have accepted Rabbi Samuel ben Meir's sensational thesis that the Midianites pulled Joseph from the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites.

I cannot accept Mr. Alter's far-fetched explanation of "nakedness." . . . My book notes that such an expression occurs also in the Koran, the *Iliad*, and in Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum*.

Finally, Mr. Alter writes that "the ancient Hebrew authors were obviously motivated by a sense of high theological purpose." Why, then, does he attribute to them "pleasures of sound-play," "pleasures of invention and expression . . . in the manipulation of which they found continual delight," etc.? Would Mr. Alter attribute these same qualities to the [authors of] Deuteronomy and the Prophets who show the same artistry of diction? Perhaps Mr. Alter would agree with my old-fashioned notion that the narrative parts of the Bible are teachings of truths about human nature which cannot be taught in any other way. The very sparseness of the biblical stories compels the student to activate his powers of imagination, experience, and insight to ascertain the message.

What is so unique in the Joseph story is the way the Bible makes Joseph the one who succeeds in teaching his brothers the lesson of brotherhood and family cohesion, that God is not only the lord of justice and retribution, but also of providence and mercy. Above all: He teaches them and us that at times God uses man's very transgressions to serve His salvational purpose.

[Rabbi] Eric I. Lowenthal
Brookline, Massachusetts

Robert Alter writes:

I would like to thank Rabbi Plaut, Rabbi Silver, and Maurice Schmidt for their kind words about my work on biblical narrative. Rabbi Plaut's proposal of a *shebher/sebher* pun is intriguing and persuasively argued. Mr. Schmidt's comment on the biblical avoidance of physical description leads me to repeat a point I developed at length in "Character in the Bible" [October 1978]—that there are other ways for writers to give life to their characters, and that it is precisely those ways we need to become more finely aware of in reading the Bible. Let me also emphasize, partly in response to Mr. Schmidt but even more for Nathan M. Kaganoff's benefit, that when I say "fiction" I do not mean legend, mere invention, or frivolous fabrication. Fiction, as I tried to show in discussing the Joseph story, is a vehicle of knowledge, a means of conveying a significant order of truths. For further clarification, I would invite Mr. Kaganoff in particular to read the second chapter, "Sacred History and the Beginnings of Prose Fiction," of my forthcoming book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

It is good of Mr. Kaganoff to share with readers excerpts from the commentary of Isaac Abrabanel. In what he quotes, certain connections are noted that I also touched on in my article—which is hardly surprising, given the clarity of the Joseph story's symmetrical structure of motifs—and other observations are made which are tangential to mine. In any case, Abrabanel's perception of certain linked motifs is hardly the same as the integral reading of the story as a narrative continuum that I attempted. Mr. Kaganoff's claim, moreover, that Abrabanel's wording is at times "very similar" to mine is utterly false, as a comparison of the two texts will readily demonstrate; and the innuendo of plagiarism introduced by this false assertion is, to put it charitably, a most regrettable lapse. Finally, I am baffled by Mr. Kaganoff's dogmatic pronouncement that the belief of the classic Jewish scholars in the divine origin of the Bible led them to understand the literary genius of the biblical text. There are, to be sure, many brilliant local perceptions about the literary art of the Bible in the traditional exegetes, but whether one is thinking of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Nahmanides, or even the classical Midrashim, the traditional commentators variously read the text didactically, philologically, mystically, homiletically, but not as an artfully conceived literary whole working with distinctive technical devices and conventions.

I thank Rabbi Lowenthal for his expression of admiration but am troubled that he should define any divergence from his own views as an interpretive "flaw." His interesting point about the phrases "Joseph's brothers" and "the sons of Israel" actually complements rather than contradicts mine. He asserts, out of the sheer authority of opinion, that there is no delicate play of implication among the various references to "brothers" in Genesis 42, but his own proposal about Benjamin illustrates just such an interplay of different meanings and associations. On the fulfillment of the dreams, my point was not at all tied to the number ten or eleven but to the fact that in both dreams surrogates of the brothers as a group bow before Joseph, the first dream of the sheaves being associated metonymically with his future role as provider, the second dream of the stars being associated symbolically with his future role of viceregent. Rabbi Samuel ben Meir's attempt to harmonize the two versions of the story by having the Midianites sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites is nothing if not ingenious, but Rabbi Lowenthal's claim that the thesis is accepted by modern scholars is without foundation. As for the phrase "nakedness of the land," the most relevant evidence is of course not Julius Caesar or Homer but the Bible itself, where elsewhere "to see nakedness" always has a sexual meaning, usually associated with taboo. This leaves, I think, my own proposal of a sexual nuance here as at least a possiblity (which is all I claimed), and by no means a far-fetched one.

Beyond these specific points of interpretation, the most fundamental difference between Rabbi Lowenthal and me is his refusal to see that religiously urgent writers can delight in their inventive mastery over their medium of expression—a creative dynamic evident in Dante and Donne as well as in Genesis and Samuel. I would certainly attribute a similar sense of artistry to the author of Deuteronomy (on this subject, see Robert Polzin's excellent new literary study, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*) and to the Prophets. The manifold and intimate links between artistic play and religious vision are in effect the chief subject of my book on biblical narrative.

Arguing with God

To the Editor of Commentary:

Although Abraham Kaplan's article, "The Jewish Argument with God" [October 1980], is an adequate introductory survey, it misses sever-

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Congress and Abortion

Let Congress follow the words, "We the People," and overturn the courts which have ignored the rights we owe to our posterity, the unborn.

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al of the key underlying concepts, primarily as a result of Mr. Kaplan's universalistic and ahistorical tendencies.

As Mr. Kaplan notes, the tradition of arguing with God is uniquely Jewish, yet all too often his frame of reference is "man" instead of "Jew," "relationship with God" instead of "Covenant." Argument with God is integrally related to the concept of the Covenant (*Brit*) which God established first with the Patriarchs and later reconfirmed with Israel at Sinai. Since the Covenant is actually a form of contract according to which both Israel and God have obligations to fulfill, there must be some provision and some means of redress should either party breach its terms. Arguing with God—called the "law-court pattern of prayer" by biblical and liturgical scholars—is the Jewish mode of appealing to God the Chief Justice against God the Partner. Since Jewish history has been long and uncommonly tragic, the "law-court" pattern of prayer, and/or the motif of argument with God, is found in every situation in which the Jewish people have experienced suffering and injustice.

Mr. Kaplan's lack of historicity in his study of the motif shows the dangers inherent in the study of any subject without reference to its historical context. If one is to generalize (or philosophize) on a motif as long-lived as "arguing with God," one should only do so with due regard for its previous manifestations in a variety of historical situations. The point is that different generations of Jews have made use of the argument motif to address their own unique problems and needs. In the Bible, the arguments have a didactic intent: to reinforce the teaching of monotheism, to refute the dual or multi-divinity religions of the ancient Near East, or to emphasize specific attributes of the Jewish God. Thus, for example, in order to stress that God is truly just and merciful, Abraham argues with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah and "convinces" God to spare the cities for the sake of ten righteous individuals. God not only agrees to Abraham's terms, but when His messengers fail to find the saving ten, He saves the few righteous individuals (Lot and his family) who do reside there.

In the rabbinic period, argument with God is found primarily in the Midrashim (or stories) which the rabbis created to clarify biblical arguments. The didactic intent is even more pronounced here. Through the words they set in the mouths of biblical figures, the rabbis sought not only to counter the threats of Gnosticism and Christianity and to advance their own interpretation of Judaism, but also to comfort and reassure the people. The rabbis also used the "law-court" pattern as a personal mode of prayer in times of emergency and communal distress.

Argument with God continued in the *piyyutim* (liturgical poetry) of the Middle Ages and in the hasidic tales; it survives today in post-Holocaust Yiddish poetry and in the works of such authors as Elie Wiesel and Zvi Kolitz (the author of *Yossel Rackover's Appeal to God*). One generalization that does apply to the medieval and modern arguments is that in large measure they focus on the singular problem of Israel's suffering in the Exile and God's apparent indifference and inactivity. What differentiates the two periods is the issue of faith and belief in God.

Argument with God is indeed a long-standing and time-honored Jewish way of relating to God, but it is only one aspect of that relationship. The important thing to keep in mind in our human-rights and protest-oriented era is that in the past Jewish defiance has coexisted with submission to God's will, anger has been coeval with love, and rejection with attraction. If today many Jews have trouble relating to God it is in part due to the "canonization" of the prayerbook, i.e., the exclusion of those contemporary poets who have voiced the anguish, doubts, and yearning of our generation, as earlier poets did for theirs (at the time of the Crusades, for example). As modern Jews struggle to articulate and express a relationship with God capable of including the trauma of the *Shoah* (the Holocaust), we would do well to heed the example of past generations in allowing the contemporary cry of protest and outrage to assume its

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rightful place alongside the many prayers of praise and petition.

[Rabbi] ANSON LAYTNER
Larchmont, New York

ABRAHAM KAPLAN writes:

Rabbi Laytner's insistence that one should philosophize only with due regard to the variety of historical situations hardly goes far enough. Due regard must also be given to the variety within any single historical situation, including our own. Today there are extremists of Reform who deny virtually the whole of Halakhah and Orthodox extremists who deny Jewish identity to all but themselves. Without prior commitment one must begin with the premise that there are as many Judaisms as there are Jews.

That different generations of Jews have argued with God so as to address their own unique problems is a truism. The question is not whether the problems of Jews vary but whether there are significant commonalities in how Jews cope with their unique problems.

There is here a basic issue of method, reflected in the perennial opposition in philosophy between time and eternity, history and timeless patterns. That one method or another seems to us called for may reflect the trained incapacity which is the price of professionalism. Understandably, a rabbi, guardian of tradition, is responsive to history, while a philosopher aspires, with Spinoza, to see all things in the light of eternity.

For this reason it is ironic that Rabbi Laytner assumes a professorial stance: "An adequate introductory survey [which] misses several of the key underlying concepts" sounds to my ears like a C-minus; I suppose I should be glad to have passed.

Less patronizing is Rabbi Laytner's criticism of my "ahistorical tendencies." I applaud his sense of history: the capacity to see the past in the present. I do not find in his letter a commensurate historical sense: the capacity to see the present as history in the making. I, too, use the motif of the argument with God as a way of addressing *our* own unique problems and needs. I welcome his support for my view that the contemporary cry of protest and outrage should be given its rightful place in Judaism.

What divides us, I think, is not that he feels that I have left something out (a ploy of criticism which does not call for a reply), but that I have included something not altogether palatable to him, what he identifies as my "universalistic" tendencies. All too often, he says, I speak of "man" instead of "Jew." The polarity between universalism and particularism is as perennial an issue in Judaism as the opposition of time and eternity is in philosophy. Appropriately enough, the fullest statement in Judaism of the argument with God—the book of Job—is expressed in universalistic idioms. The central character is introduced with the words, "There was a *man* in the land of Uz," not, like Mordechai in the book of Esther, "There was a Jew." But, of course, books like Job have not appeared too often.

In our time there are Jews who are particularists with regard to Jewish teaching and universalists only in politics. I cannot agree with them, in either respect. For my part, Jewish thought is a particular expression of universal modes of coping with the human condition. This circumstance does not deny us the right to our own independent existence, the right to define for ourselves how our common humanity is to be uniquely expressed.

Rabbi Laytner urges that the important thing to keep in mind is that Jewish defiance has coexisted with submission, love, and attraction to God. I am afraid he misses my key underlying concept: God is not only an object of worship but a point of reference by which the Jew defines his own identity as a moral agent. Thus it is that Abram becomes Abraham and Jacob, Israel, and thus Jewish thinkers from Saadya to Buber have explicated how man becomes an "I" through the "Thou." What exactly enters into Jewish identity has always been problematic.

For the Jew, "I beg to differ" has been an enduring tactic of achieving and affirming identity. The Jew has addressed the same caveat to God—not in self-contradiction, but in a dialectic aiming at attainment of fuller realization of who he is, as Jew and as human being. Rabbi Laytner's determination to differ with me puts him on my side after all.

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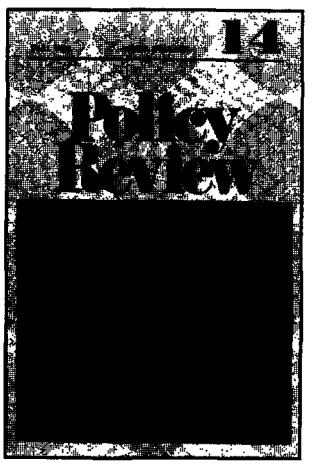

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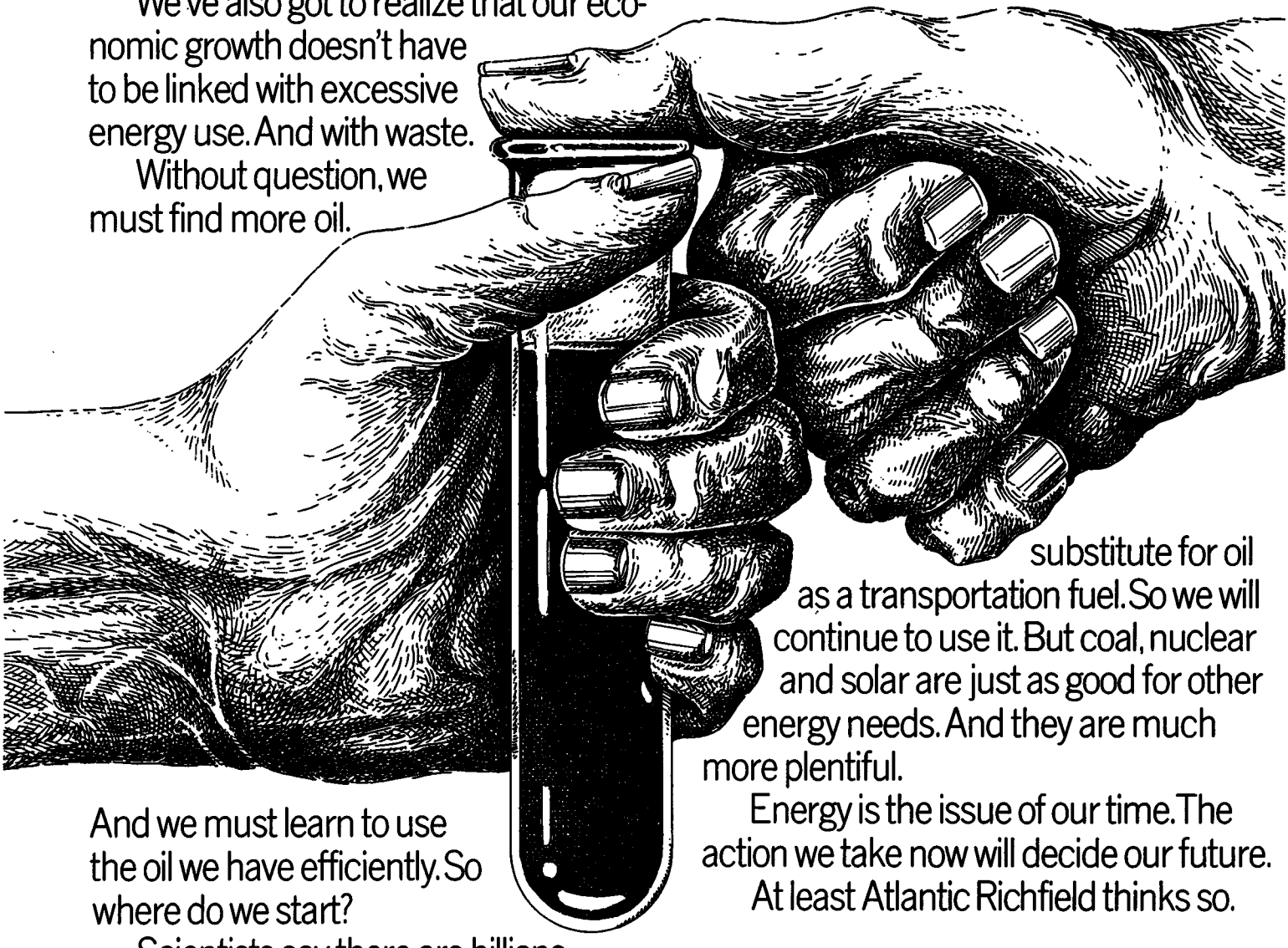

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"Joining the Jackals"

The U.S. at the UN 1977-1980

Daniel P. Moynihan

A DEFEAT so overwhelming as that which Governor Reagan inflicted on President Carter soon takes on the air of the inevitable. Before it does it may be useful to record that those who were defeated in no way looked upon the outcome as fated. To the contrary, the view in the White House was that things were going well until March 1, when Ambassador Donald F. McHenry voted in favor of a particularly vicious anti-Israel resolution in the Security Council of the United Nations, followed three weeks later by the appearance of Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in which he refused to disavow the vote. Thereafter, in this view, everything spun out of control. The Carter administration left Washington convinced—and proclaiming—that defeat was brought on by malevolent incompetence at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations and the inability of the Secretary of State to control the Mission. What they did not proclaim and only dimly understood was that they themselves had put in place the ideas which helped bring them down; that indeed in that sense the outcome *was* fated.

Set forth by President Carter and others, the sequence of events was as follows. Senator Edward M. Kennedy's challenge to the President began poorly. On March 18 the two met in Illinois, the first industrial state to hold a primary. The President won handily. If Kennedy could be beaten a week later, in New York, his candidacy would collapse. A private poll conducted by Dresner, Morris & Tortorello Research in late January and early February showed the President leading the Senator 54 percent to 28 percent among probable Democratic primary voters in New York, with only 13 percent undecided. Yet in the end, Kennedy won, 59 percent to 41 percent.

In a gracious gesture, after the results were in, Lieutenant Governor Mario M. Cuomo, who headed Mr. Carter's campaign in New York, called the President to apologize. "No," said Mr. Carter as reported in the New York *Times*, "it was the United Nations vote." In an interview with Meg Greenfield of the Washington *Post* on March 27, Mr. Carter, speaking of an incumbent's problems in running for reelection, repeated the point:

> . . . Then to make a mistake like we did on the UN vote and have the Secretary of State testify a few days before the election. . . .

The same theme was sounded, finally, in a postmortem by Steven R. Weisman and Terence Smith of the *Times* after the national election:

> This blunder, in which the administration first voted in favor of a March 1 resolution rebuking Israel on settlements in Arab-claimed territory and then disavowed it, cost the President dearly among Jewish voters in the March 18 [*sic*] New York primary. Senator Kennedy carried the state and attracted new contributions to his campaign, which carried on through the last batch of primaries on June 3.
>
> "New York was our chance to knock Kennedy out of the box early," said Mr. [Robert S.] Strauss, the campaign chairman. "We blew it with that vote."

Jody Powell told the *Times* reporters that in consequence, "We sure as hell spent a lot of time and money fighting him that would have been better spent against Reagan."

Now it will be clear that there are many reasons President Carter lost the election, of which the UN vote was only one and scarcely the most important. What is important, however, is that the administration had looked upon its United Nations record as a huge success. Other policies had failed, and that proved costly. But this had succeeded, and proved costly. When the fall of a President is involved, and possibly also the fall of a party, some notice should be taken. For I do not conceal my judgment that so long as the ideas underlying the Carter administration's UN policy are dominant within the Democratic party, we Democrats will be out of power.

DANIEL P. MOYNIHAN, United States Senator (D.) from New York, has also served as Ambassador both in India and at the United Nations. His many previous contributions to COMMENTARY include "The Politics of Human Rights" (August 1977), "Party and International Politics" (February 1977), and the widely discussed "The United States in Opposition" (March 1975). He is the author of, among other books, *Coping: On the Practice of Government, Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*, and *Counting Our Blessings*.

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IN NORMAL circumstances UN affairs play a marginal role in United States foreign policy, the simple reason being that American foreign policy is normally preoccupied with the Soviet Union, and the UN, with its profusion of small, even mini, states, is the last setting in which two powers would wish to conduct their affairs. But four years ago, to the incoming Carter administration, the main attraction of the UN as a setting in which to conduct foreign policy was precisely the prominent role Third World nations play in UN affairs, and the North-South axis of the place. This was a setting in which the cold war could at last be put behind us. In his first major foreign-policy address, given at Notre Dame on May 22, 1977, President Carter reported that the United States had overcome its "inordinate fear of Communism," and proposed that the two powers now join in a cooperative effort to improve North-South relations, specifically through economic assistance to the developing nations. In the meantime, the name of the UN Ambassador was promoted to second place on the directory of the State Department building, immediately below that of the Secretary.

In his Notre Dame speech, as in his appointments, President Carter brought together two strains in Democratic thinking on foreign affairs. The first was the old tradition of liberal internationalism—the extension of domestic standards of social justice to the world at large—exemplified by President Harry S. Truman's Point Four program or President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress.

But there was another and newer strain of thought, one much at odds with the traditions of Truman and Kennedy. This was the view that had emerged in the course of the Vietnam war to the effect that the United States, by virtue of its enormous power, and in consequence of policies and perhaps even national characteristics that were anything *but* virtuous, had become a principal source of instability and injustice in the world. We were, in short, a status-quo power, and the status quo we were trying to preserve was abominable. By contrast, a more positive future was available to mankind if it could break out of the American dominion. Much has been written of this, and one need not expand. For my part the most evocative and excruciating memory of the onset of this point of view was the day that a group of former Peace Corps volunteers, protesting the war, ran down the American flag at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington and ran up that of the Vietcong.

Through the 1970's this view grew in strength within the Democratic party. It was most often to be encountered when issues of defense were involved. In an article written in November 1980, R. James Woolsey, who served with distinction as Under Secretary of the Navy in the Carter administration, described how

> leaders of many of the interest groups that claim to represent the traditional Democratic constituencies have convinced themselves over the last decade or so that they must be the enemies of increased American military power.

He explained why these constituencies had come to feel this way:

> What you spend on tanks you can't spend on schools or welfare, nor can you keep it. This is, however, an ageless problem of government. . . . Perhaps more important, the agony of Vietnam introduced a new element and led the interest-group spokesmen and many liberal Democratic politicians to attack the *existence* of American military power as a way to curtail its exercise. Throughout much of the 1970's, the halls of the Senate Office Buildings, for example, were jammed with young staff members looking for a weapons system to have their Senator oppose. They, and their friends in the executive branch, are now typing up their resumés in no small measure because the voters understood what many of the elected officials did not—that caution in using military power is wise, but unilateral restraint in obtaining it in the face of a massive build-up by a potential enemy is extremely dangerous.

There was a precise corollary to this doctrine of self-denial in defense, and it flowed from the idea that the political hostility which the United States encountered around the world, and especially in the Third World, was, very simply, evidence of American aggression or at least of American wrongdoing. The aggression could be military, but just as often it would be diagnosed as economic (the role of the multinational corporation) or ecological (plundering the planet to sustain an obscenely gross standard of living). Often it would be presented as nothing more specific than *not* being "on the side of history" or "the side of change." No matter, the prescription was the same. If the United States denied itself the *means* of aggression, it would cease to be aggressive. When it ceased to be aggressive, there would be peace—in the halls of the United Nations no less than in the rice paddies of Southeast Asia.

AS TANKS and missiles were the instrument of military aggression, so ideas were the means of diplomatic aggression—specifically that array of attitudes, judgments, and prejudices which led Americans to suppose they represented on balance a successful society, one model of how developing societies, if fortunate, might turn out, and in the interval a fair standard by which to measure the merits of other societies.

Here, in the interest of what lawyers call full disclosure, let me acknowledge that, from the first, those members of the Carter administration responsible for policy at the UN, and more generally for relations with the developing nations, regarded my own brief tenure as U.S. Permanent

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Representative at the UN in 1975-76 as the prime example of American diplomatic aggression.

This was notably the view of C. William Maynes, who left the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace to become President Carter's Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs. It was the view of the Ambassadors who came and went at the U.S. Mission beginning with Andrew Young and ending with Donald McHenry. In an interview published in September 1980, contrasting his performance with mine, Ambassador McHenry said:

> I don't believe in confrontation politics, I don't believe in name-calling. I do believe in communicating with them [i.e., Third World nations], in stating my views, listening to theirs, respecting their views, expecting them to respect mine.

A few weeks later, on October 1, 1980, taking issue with a New York *Times Magazine* article entitled "How the Third World Runs the UN," he returned to this theme:

> The article was reminiscent of the speeches about the "Tyranny of the Majority" that one of my predecessors used to deliver when he represented our country at what he later called "A Very Dangerous Place."*

Yet there was a fateful avoidance of reality in the new administration's view: a denial that there is genuine hostility toward the United States in the world and true conflicts of interest between this nation and others—an illusion that a surface reasonableness and civility are the same as true cooperation.

To be sure, if there are conflicts of interest among states, there are also truly shared interests, and even genuine friendships. The world, alas, is complex, and although the new men of the Carter administration professed to understand complexity where others had missed it, they were in fact great simplifiers. They trivialized the sources of real conflict between the United States and other nations, and they exaggerated our ability to resolve them to everyone's satisfaction.

Again, one notes a parallel with the approach of the new administration to defense and foreign policy. One of the first (and fateful) decisions of President Carter was to appoint Paul Warnke as negotiator for the strategic-arms-limitations talks with the Soviets. Warnke in his celebrated article "Apes on a Treadmill' had set forth the thesis that the Soviets essentially imitate American behavior in defense matters. Thus just as the United States could turn enmity into friendship merely by avoiding "confrontation politics" in its dealings with the Third World, so the United States could change Soviet behavior simply by changing its own.

But if these ideas had a parallel structure, they did not prove equally durable. Although President Carter had campaigned in 1976 on a pledge to cut the defense budget, his promise did not survive the first encounters with reality—the reality of conflicting interests and genuine danger. Instead, it was buried, and (admittedly modest) increases in defense spending commenced. The same readiness to retreat from unrealistic approaches was evident in the area of human rights (and indeed, here the administration's retreat was almost overeager). But if in these areas reality obliged the administration to think better of the ideas by which it had hoped to guide policy, no such perceptions ever managed to penetrate our approach to the United Nations. We would unilaterally change the whole international atmosphere simply by avoiding "confrontation politics." The United States would make amends for its past failures by a greater responsiveness, by greater openness, by at last understanding the problems of others and their perspectives. Thus the psychological arrogance that lay behind the seeming humility of our new relations with the Third World—it was *we* who still determined how others behaved—remained intact.

At the UN the arrogance of this view was particularly risky, for those convinced of the abuse of American power found themselves representing the United States at a time when our power was in fact much reduced. Whether American interests could, even so, be protected would depend on how well this decline was perceived, on the suppleness of the new tactics that would be brought to bear, and above all on the ability to sense failure when it struck one across the face. The new administration was conducting an experiment of a sort; much would depend on whether it could tell the difference between good results and bad.

BEFORE defeat in the 1980 election forced a different conclusion upon them, the Carter people were of the opinion that the experiment had been a brilliant success. From the 1980 Democratic platform—prepared in cooperation with the staff of the National Security Council—one learned that when the administration came to power in 1977,

> relations with the Third World were at their nadir. The United States appeared hostile and indifferent to the developing world's aspirations

* It would be hard to pack more misinformation into a single sentence. It was President Gerald R. Ford, in an address at the opening of the General Assembly in the fall of 1974, who warned the UN against "the tyranny of the majority"; at the close of that session Ambassador John A. Scali repeated the warning. If I ever used the phrase, which I do not recall doing, it was only to cite them. As for "A Very Dangerous Place," in 1978 I published a memoir about the UN with a passage on the first page: "I had first gone to Washington with John F. Kennedy and then stayed on with Lyndon Johnson. There I learned as an adult what I had known as a child, which is that the world is a dangerous place—and learned also that not everyone knows this." My editor thought *A Dangerous Place* would be a good title; but I was not referring to the UN. As seamen are taught of the sea, the UN is not inherently a dangerous element, but is implacably punishing of carelessness.

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for greater justice, respect, and dignity. All this has changed.

Testifying before a House Subcommittee on March 27, 1980 (two days, mind, after the New York primary), Assistant Secretary Maynes spoke even more glowingly of changes that had come over the UN:

> . . . the UN has become the crossroad of global diplomacy.
>
> . . . [It] now appears to be less unfriendly and dangerous a place than some have led us to believe. It is also possible that we will find there a greater spirit of cooperation than before—not just in condemning the lawless but also in advancing the rule of law. But these promises may come to naught unless we adopt a more mature stance toward the UN itself.
>
> We must remind ourselves that the United States needs the UN at least as much as it needs us.

One might have thought this assessment would be reflected in votes in the General Assembly or the Security Council. But it was not. Worse, the ideas of the new administration stood in the way of seeing opportunities to be seized and understanding problems to be met.

This was perhaps to be expected. The heavy emphasis on North-South relations, after all, was surely a way of coping with, or at least diverting attention from, the difficult realities of the post-Vietnam world. "American imperialism" had been defeated. Our defeat had been caused, to be sure, by overreaching and after a point it could not perhaps have been avoided. But its consequences, all the same, would have to be lived with, and adjusted to; foremost among them would be a major opening for, and stimulus to, *Soviet* imperialism. Susan Sontag has recently acknowledged how little she and others in the anti-war movement had understood this equation:

> It was not so clear to many of us as we talked of American imperialism how few options many of these countries had except for Soviet imperialism, which was maybe worse. When I was in Cuba and North Vietnam, it was not clear to me then that they would become Soviet satellites, but history has been very cruel and the options available to these countries were fewer than we had hoped. It's become a lot more complicated.

But the perception of such complexity was beyond the powers of the U.S. Mission to the UN under the Carter administration. Its members could not see the signs of a new phase of Soviet policy: military support for Ethiopia in 1977, coups in both Afghanistan and South Yemen in April 1978, the invasion of Cambodia in December 1978. Unable to explain all this or to fit it to the purposes they had set themselves, American diplomats at the UN grew increasingly silent.

It also emerged that our representatives had little sense of the UN Charter as *law* that had to be upheld, and to be expounded. A superb opportunity came in the fall of 1977 when the Soviets switched sides in the Horn of Africa. Abandoning Somalia, they actively entered the war in the Ogaden, an ethnically Somali territory, on the side of Ethiopia. Of a sudden the Somalis were pounding on our doors begging for help, pleading for us to understand the "nature of the Soviet threat," Soviet "neocolonialism," the "Soviet plot to encircle the Gulf," the "Soviet contempt for human rights and the rights of small nations."

Now it happens that in 1975 the principal sponsor of the resolution that declared Zionism to be a form of racism was none other than Somalia (acting in its then capacity as an especially fawning satellite of the Soviets). After the resolution was adopted, I rose in the General Assembly and addressed the following words directly to the Somalis:

> Today we have drained the word "racism" of its meaning. Tomorrow terms like "national self-determination" and "national honor" will be perverted in the same way to serve the purposes of conquest and exploitation. And when these claims begin to be made . . . it is the small nations of the world whose integrity will suffer. And how will the small nations of the world defend themselves, on what grounds will others be moved to defend and protect them, when the language of human rights, the only language by which the small can be defended, is no longer believed and no longer has a power of its own?

With the Somalis bleating in terror, pleading for help, did the U.S. Mission to the UN make a single reference to their behavior in 1975, and our response? None. This would have been to engage in "confrontation," a practice of the discredited past.

The United States helped found the UN, mostly wrote the Charter, has largely paid for the place. U.S. representatives have an obligation to insist that there are *standards* written into that Charter. Occasionally we would stand up for them. In 1978 William J. vanden Heuvel, the U.S. representative to the UN in Geneva, actually objected to the appointment of a KGB officer as director of personnel for UN activities in that city. (The appointment was a clear violation of article 100 of the Charter.) But there were few such instances. Not even when UNESCO, that embodiment of a decent liberal optimism, set about developing an international regime for state control of the press under the insolent euphemism of "A New World Information Order" did we engage in "confrontation." No, never. And so it went.

But the crucial turning point came with Camp David, which involved an irony worthy to be called tragic. Perhaps the most impressive achievement of Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State had been to cooperate with Anwar Sadat in maneuvering the Soviets out of Egypt. Together Sadat and Kissinger had had to stand against the efforts of Soviet policy to scuttle the

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new pro-American alignment of Egypt and the step-by-step peace negotiations, which had scored a major success with the second disengagement agreement of May 1975. The Zionism-is-racism resolution in November of the same year was itself one part of this sabotage campaign.

That the UN and its Third World majority could be manipulated for the purposes of an assault on American policy was much more poorly apprehended after Kissinger's departure. In fact, in its desire to dissociate itself from the past, the Carter administration set out *to bring the Soviets back*. The still startling Soviet-American communiqué (issued jointly but plainly Soviet-drafted) of October 1, 1977 proposed to reconvene the Geneva Conference, a meeting under UN auspices at which the two nations would be co-chairmen and to which all interested parties would be invited. To Sadat the meaning of this was clear: a veto in the hands of the radical forces, immediate stalemate, ultimately perhaps his overthrow. And so to avoid going to Geneva, he went to Jerusalem (where, he had every reason to know, a deal was waiting to be struck with the Begin government). This set in motion the events that ended with the Camp David accords of 1978, and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979—Carter's single greatest achievement, albeit purchased only by a reversal of his original "Geneva" approach and by shifting negotiations over the Middle East away from the UN.

Inevitably forces at the UN would resent this. Thus it is not too much to say that the supreme test of the Carter policy at the United Nations was whether that body would leave him alone to make peace between Israel and its neighbors. Had his diplomats, through their new approach, acquired sufficient influence with the far-flung nations of the Third World to persuade them to stay out of disputes with which most of them had in any event only the remotest connection?

The answer was not long in coming. First, the remaining Arab states, with Iraq only momentarily absent, convened a "confrontation summit" in Damascus to fight the Camp David settlement. Iraq soon was brought in, and before the year was out leaders of all Arab states except Egypt had met in Baghdad to form a "rejection front" against Egypt and Israel. Simultaneously the Soviet Union (returning to the tactics it had used in 1975 to counter its expulsion from Egypt) escalated its campaign to delegitimate Israel by identifying it with the Nazis.

Having been sounded in 1971 with a two-part article in *Pravda* entitled "Anti-Sovietism is the Profession of Zionists," this theme was steadily elaborated and diffused. (The original *Pravda* article, for example, asserted that the massacre at Babi Yar had been a collaboration of Nazis and Zionists.) Once the idea had been set, it proceeded to be popularized on television, in novels, and finally in children's publications. Thus the October 10, 1980 issue of *Pionerskaya Pravda*, a tabloid-size weekly for children aged nine to fourteen who belong to the Soviet youth organization, Pioneers:

> Zionists try to penetrate all spheres of public life, as well as ideology, science, and trade. Even Levi jeans contribute to their operations: the revenue obtained from the sale of these pants are used by the firm to help the Zionists.
>
> Most of the largest monopolies in the manufacture of arms are controlled by Jewish bankers. Business made on blood brings them enormous profits. Bombs and missiles explode in Lebanon—the bankers Lazars and Leibs are making money. Thugs in Afghanistan torment schoolchildren with gases—the bundles of dollars are multiplying in the safes of the Lehmans and Guggenheims. It is clear that Zionism's principal enemy— is peace on earth.
>
> . . . The United Nations described Zionism as a form of racism and racial discrimination. More and more people today are beginning to realize that Zionism is present-day fascism.

This propaganda seemed to possess the Soviets internationally as well as at home, and they began to insist that other nations join in the campaign to treat Israel as an outlaw state, indeed a non-state, an entity without the rights of statehood. It began to work. In 1978 Cuba became head of the "nonaligned nations." A summit meeting of these states in Havana between September 3 and 7, 1979 adopted a resolution that declared:

> The heads of state or government reaffirmed that racism, including zionism [*sic*], racial discrimination, and especially *apartheid* constituted crimes against humanity and represented violations of the United Nations Charter and of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [Paragraph 237, Final Declaration of the Conference].

In June 1980 at the ministerial meeting of the Organization of African Unity, held in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Israel was referred to in official documents merely as the "Zionist entity." And on October 8, 1980 the Soviets signed a Friendship Treaty with Syria of which Article 3 declared:

> The High Contracting Parties, guided by their belief in the equality of all peoples and states, regardless of race and religious beliefs, condemn colonialism, racism and zionism [*sic*] as one of the forms and manifestations of racism, and reaffirm their resolve to wage relentless struggle against them.

This was perhaps the clearest statement to date of the Soviet Union's opposition to the very existence of the state of Israel, but its essential purpose had been evident for at least a decade.

No less evident was what the United States Mission to the United Nations should have done. The Arab nations were split; the United States was, in effect, allied with the largest of them, Egypt, and in the cause of peace in the Middle East. The Soviet Union,

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though it might declare that "thugs in Afghanistan" were "tormenting schoolchildren" for the profit of Zionists, had established itself beyond all question as a brutal conqueror of Third World peoples and as an anti-Semitic regime of near demented proportions. The moment to fragment or silence the opposition was at hand.

Faced with this assault on the UN Charter, on peace, on decency—and, not so incidentally, on the President of the United States—what did our people do? *They took the other side.*

To persons whose deepest conviction was that Third World nations were hostile to the United States because of our own neocolonial behavior; whose strong disposition was to believe that the Soviet Union in almost all instances supported the true liberationist forces in the former colonial world while the United States, on the wrong side of history, backed brutal but doomed dictatorships —the events from 1977 to 1980 could make no sense. It became ever more difficult for such people to understand and support their own government's policy. For had not the Camp David framework, its peaceful appearances notwithstanding, called forth a more sustained disagreement between the U.S. and the Third World than even the "confrontationist" policies of the past? To understand this one had to entertain the possibility that the opposition we encountered there was *not* a matter of long-held grievances against our abuses of power. One had to entertain the possibility that there were those whose great fear was that in seeking peace we might succeed.

Confused, and after a point not altogether straightforward, the strategy of our diplomats in New York, backed up in the Department of State, started to undergo a subtle and disastrous transformation. They had begun with the proposition that if the United States put itself on the "right" side of history, we would find the nations of the world, most of which of course were "new," coming over to our side in turn. Unaccountably, however, they were still not on our side. To the contrary, some were actively seeking to undo the greatest diplomatic achievement the administration had to its credit, and *none*—not one—was objecting to or trying to impede such efforts. Evidently, then, we must *still* be on the wrong side. Reasoning thus, our diplomats prepared themselves to vote for the Security Council Resolution of March 1, 1980 and (though this was certainly not their intention) to help bring down the administration they served.

THE chain of resolutions passed in condemnation of Israel by the Security Council in 1979-80 forms a complex story. Yet to follow it only a single point needs to be understood. It is that, as a direct result of American policy, the Security Council was allowed to degenerate to the condition of the General Assembly.

Under the UN Charter the General Assembly reaches decisions by majority vote, but its decisions are purely recommendatory (Article 10). By contrast, the Security Council has power. In situations where it determines that there is a "threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression," the Council "shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken. . . ." These include "such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary. . . ." The Security Council, in a word, may make war. And for that reason the Security Council does not operate by majority vote. Any permanent member may veto any action, simply by voting No. However, in the face of the increasingly vicious Soviet-Arab assaults that followed Camp David, the United States began to abstain. I have represented the United States on the Security Council; I have served as President of the Security Council. *I state as a matter of plain and universally understood fact that for the United States to abstain on a Security Council resolution concerning Israel is the equivalent of acquiescing.*

The first abstention in the sequence we are now tracing occurred on March 22, 1979 when the Council, in a resolution directed against Israel, established a three-member commission "to examine the situation relating to establishments in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem." The phrasing here was ominous: "Arab territories . . . including Jerusalem." Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. How could its capital be in the territory of others?

Equally ominous, although at this point restrained, was the reaffirmation of earlier Council statements that the Fourth Geneva Convention "is applicable to the Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967, including Jerusalem" and the strict injunction upon Israel "as the occupying Power, to abide scrupulously by the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention." Now, the Fourth Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War is one of a series of treaties designed to codify the behavior of Nazi Germany and make such behavior criminal under international law. This particular convention applied to the Nazi practice of deporting or murdering vast numbers of persons in Western Poland—as at Auschwitz—and plans for settling the territory with Germans. The assertion that the Geneva Convention also applied to the West Bank played, of course, perfectly into the Soviet propaganda position that "Zionism is present-day fascism."

Within a year the new commission had submitted two reports. In response to these, on March 1, 1980, a resolution (465) was submitted to the Council that was as viciously anti-Israel—and as destructive of the Camp David accords—as any that had ever been encountered or could readily be devised. Israel was found to be in "flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention": the first nation in history to be found guilty of behaving as the government of Nazi Germany had behaved. It was determined

that all measures taken by Israel to change the

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physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure or status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, or any part thereof, have no legal validity. . . .

In a word, according to Resolution 465, Israel is an outlaw state, guilty of war crimes. (Not the Vietnamese invaders of Cambodia, or the Soviets in Afghanistan. Israel!) Its alleged capital is not its capital at all—"Jerusalem or any part thereof"—and it is in illegal occupation of territory now for the first time designated "Palestinian."

Here, then, was the triumph of everything the Soviets and the "Rejectionists" had stood for: the repudiation of everything Sadat, and for that matter Begin and Carter, had sought. Yet the United States voted in favor of this resolution. Shortly thereafter the administration stated that this had been a "mistake." It was no mistake at all. Resolution 465 reflected the view of the majority of members of the United Nations, and the U.S. Mission there had simply come to accept that view. Their conception of the world, by now shared in Washington, gave them no alternative.

Once the vote was cast there came the shock of recognition, in Washington at least, that *this* was what that conception led to. But still they clung to it. The White House, sensing the disaster and the dilemma, did not want any testimony given before Congress. The State Department insisted, and so on March 20 the New York *Times* reported:

VANCE REBUFFS CALL FOR FULL DISAVOWAL OF UN'S ISRAEL MOVE

Yet it was more than that. Vance would neither disavow the episode nor acknowledge it. He could not bring himself to admit consequences he could not desire of a policy he could not repudiate.

THE operative paragraphs of Resolution 465 began by stating that the Security Council:

1. *Commends* the work done by the Commission in preparing the report. . . .;

2. *Accepts* the conclusions and recommendations contained in the above-mentioned report of the Commission;

Yet Vance in his testimony on March 20 suggested that nothing, really, had happened, that voting for the resolution did not imply support for the commission report which had occasioned it.

Senator Paul S. Sarbanes of Maryland went directly to this point:

SENATOR SARBANES. Mr. Secretary, the resolution that was passed and for which we voted, accepts the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report of the commission established by Security Council Resolution 446.

Do I take your assertion to be that the word "accepts" there means nothing more than "receives"?

SECRETARY VANCE. You do correctly understand.

SENATOR SARBANES. Why wasn't the word "receives" used? I would understand the word "accepts" to carry with it some element of subscribing to the conclusions in the recommendation.

SECRETARY VANCE. No; it was merely intended to connote receives. Accepts—they hand them to me, they are accepted.

I joined in the questioning:

SENATOR MOYNIHAN. Very frankly, . . . Mr. Secretary, I am concerned with our reputation for plain dealing.

Did anyone at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations tell you that in a Security Council resolution, the word "accepts" should be read to mean "receives"?

SECRETARY VANCE. Yes: I have been told that.

SENATOR MOYNIHAN. You have been told that?

SECRETARY VANCE. Yes

SENATOR MOYNIHAN. Sir, I once served as U.S. Permanent Representative there. I can tell you that I could not conceive telling a Secretary of State that the word "accepts" should be read to mean as in a letter, "Dear Sir, I have received your letter of" so and so.

The first paragraph, the preambular paragraph of a Security Council resolution starts out always, "Taking note of." This is the paragraph that says, "We have received."

"Accepts," on the other hand, is a slight variation on the word "endorse." It would be the only way it would have been understood in my time there, sir.

I think you have been misinformed, sir, and I think you have been done a disservice.*. . .

Something quite extraordinary was happening here. It is of course possible that the members of the U.S. Mission had simply not told the truth to the Secretary of State. (They had evidently been less than candid on some other questions concerning the resolutions—informing him, for example, that references to Jerusalem had been excised from the text when they had not.) But how could a lawyer of Cyrus Vance's ability believe such an untruth save that at high and low levels alike the men of our government were deceiving *themselves*? The Carter administration had failed in its objectives at the UN; but to admit that failure was to cast in doubt the view of the world that justified

* A brief review of UN documents will make clear that "accept" has the everyday meaning of "endorse." After the first commission report was submitted in July 1979, it became the subject of Security Council Resolution 452, in which the Council voted to "accept" its recommendations. The members of the commission easily understood what this meant. They wrote in their second report (which in turn became the subject of Resolution 465) that they had taken particular steps "bearing in mind that the Security Council, in Resolution 452 (1979), had *accepted the recommendations* contained in the commission's first report . . ." (emphasis added).

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the very existence of the administration. And to protect itself from having to face this failure, the administration had begun to undermine Camp David itself—its one great success.

THE March 1 vote, then, was a disaster and should have stimulated a reappraisal of the route by which the administration had traveled to it. Israel had been permanently damaged, and (unless their perceptions are perilously dulled) other allies of the United States permanently warned. Yet no more was said than that it was a mistake, and only a partial mistake at that. The administration never thought its way through the matter. Those publicly most identified with these policies had already begun to leave —first Ambassador Young, then Assistant Secretary Maynes, and finally Secretary Vance himself. But the policies persisted. By the end of the Carter administration the pattern had become all but impossible to overcome. One can measure it this way: on nine substantive votes on the Middle East taken in the Security Council between January 1979 and August 1980 the United States abstained seven times.

Just once we cast a veto—striking down a Tunisian resolution of last April 30 which called for the creation of a Palestinian state. *This* resolution, one might note, unlike the one we voted for on March 1, did refer to "secure and recognized boundaries"—the language of Resolution 242—but only for the Palestinian state. *Not* for Israel.

To be sure, we occasionally made our unhappiness known. In August 1980, for example, Secretary of State Edmund S. Muskie went to New York and defended the American approach to a Middle East peace settlement based on the Camp David accords:

> Let me . . . repeat our belief that this constant recourse to debates and resolutions that are not germane to the peace process—and even harmful to it—should stop.

A salutary sentiment, but what must the other members have thought? For Secretary Muskie was asking on behalf of the United States for the end of a process that *it was perfectly within our power to end.* If we believed such resolutions to be harmful to the peace process, we were free to veto them. We were free to deny them the force of law they acquire when they pass. The same point could be made of such American statements on the March 1 resolution as this one by President Carter:

> While our opposition to the establishment of the Israeli settlements is long-standing and well known, we made strenuous efforts to eliminate the language with reference to the dismantling of settlements in the resolution.

Yet when the strenuous efforts failed, the U.S. Permanent Representative had only to raise his hand, to vote No, and the resolution would have failed.

Having committed itself, however, to solidarity with the majority at the UN, the Carter administration could not bring itself to exercise the veto. Thus in our flight from "confrontation" did we end not by understanding the perspectives of others, but by adopting them.

In so doing, we have acquiesced in a very great deal.

After March 1 the application of the Fourth Geneva Convention became a routine of Security Council resolutions. It was invoked in Resolutions 460 (May 8, 1980), 469 (May 20, 1980), and 471 (June 5, 1980), all three of which dealt with Israel's expulsion of two Palestinian mayors in the wake of terrorist attacks on Israeli civilian settlers. Where once there was the routine affirmation of Resolution 242, we now have routine indictments of Israel for Hitlerian crimes.

The U.S. abstained even when Israel's sovereignty itself was at issue. The last Security Council resolutions in this cycle of attacks on Israel were adopted in the summer of 1980 and dealt specifically with Jerusalem. Resolution 476 of June 30, 1980 warned Israel about its pending legislation on the annexation of East Jerusalem. One might well question the prudence of this Israeli law—and many have done so—but it was something else again to find that in Resolution 476 (as in its successor Resolution 477 of August 20) Israel had become the "occupying power" of its own capital. Both resolutions, in fact, seemed to include the *entire* city of Jerusalem within this charge. And Resolution 477 went still further: it declared the Basic Law on Jerusalem, by then passed, to be null and void. It declared in effect that Israel was not entitled to fix the location of its own capital city, and called—in a wholly unprecedented step—on member states to withdraw their embassies from this capital (which all did).

AN epilogue of sorts took place in the third week of December 1980, as the Carter administration and the 35th General Assembly began winding down. On Monday, December 15, the General Assembly adopted five resolutions on the Middle East more virulent and anti-Semitic than perhaps anything the UN had yet seen. The debate was obscene. Thus the Ambassador of Jordan speaking of the Ambassador of Israel:

> The representative of the Zionist entity is evidently incapable of concealing his deep-seated hatred toward the Arab world for having broken loose from the notorious exploitation of its natural resources, long held in bondage and plundered by his own people's cabal, which controls and manipulates and exploits the rest of humanity by controlling the money and wealth of the world.

The occasion was the receipt of the most recent Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, a body established by General Assembly resolution

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on November 10, 1975, the same day Zionism was declared to be a form of "racism and racial discrimination."

The first of the resolutions was breathtaking:

> Security Council Resolution 242 of 22 November 1967 does not provide an adequate basis for a just solution for the question of Palestine.

One of the more dishonest (and debilitating because profoundly misleading) assertions of the U.S. Mission during the Carter years was that the 1975 Zionism resolution was somehow brought about by the United States. Having resisted, America was judged to have provoked. That resolution passed 67 to 55 with 15 abstentions. This resolution, potentially far more destructive, was adopted 98 to 16 with 32 abstentions.

The United States said nothing. *No American delegate went to the podium to offer the smallest demur.* Next, a resolution denounced the Camp David accords, declaring that the General Assembly

> Expresses its strong opposition to all partial agreements and separate treaties which constitute a flagrant violation of the rights of the Palestinian people, the principles of the Charter, . . . [*etc*].

The United States said nothing. The last of the resolutions reasserted Israeli violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. This time the United States, by abstaining, said all there was to say.

There was something of note in the sponsors of the resolutions. The familiar Soviet-leaning or Soviet-dominated nations were present: Afghanistan, Cuba, Lao People's Democratic Republic. But present also were Nicaragua and Zimbabwe, two Third World nations with which the Carter administration had presumably established relations of friendship and respect.

As for North-South relations, on Wednesday of that week Ambassador McHenry acknowledged that the General Assembly's Special Session on economic development which had convened in September had come to nothing. Finally, on Friday, December 19, the United States voted for a Security Council resolution condemning Israel for the expulsion of two Arab mayors (an expulsion which followed upon parliamentary debate, trials before an independent judiciary, and the usual processes of a possibly wrongheaded but stubbornly democratic society). Ambassador McHenry explained that the Fourth Geneva Convention "prohibits deportations, whatever the motive of the occupying power."

In an editorial entitled, "Joining the Jackals," the Washington *Post*, which had supported the President for reelection, described this American vote against Israel in the Security Council on that Friday as representative of "the essential Carter." Now the President himself was being held to account.

American failure was total. And it was squalid. These men, in New York and Washington, helped to destroy the President who appointed them, deeply injured the President's party, hurt the United States, and hurt nations that have stood with the United States in seeking something like peace in the Middle East. They came to office full of themselves and empty of any steady understanding of the world. The world was a more dangerous place when at last they went away.

THOSE who now take office must deal with the aftermath of this massive failure of policy. The Security Council resolutions are time bombs. Ticking. The case has all but been made that Israel is an outlaw state, and indeed the General Assembly has now called on the Security Council to consider imposing sanctions against it. It will take the toughest-minded diplomacy to dismantle the indictment now in place—thanks to the Carter administration; thanks to those who brought the Democratic party to such confusions. The new administration will have to deal also with the whole question of the Third World. It should be clearer now that hostility toward the West, toward the United States, is abiding and, it may be, burgeoning.

Yet it remains for the United States to evolve a mode of dealing with the UN majority, and this in some measure turns on what kind of countries we think them to be. Irving Kristol has put the matter at its bleakest:

> The radical-nationalist ideologies of these nations, so far from being a prelude to the liberal-constitutionalism we revere, are a kind of epilogue. They—or at least their ruling elites—have seen our present and reject it as their future. So long as we refuse to confront this reality, we do not have a clear vision of the world the U.S. inhabits. And so long as there is no such clear vision, there can be no coherent foreign policy.

My own view is more sanguine: consider India, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica. There are others—many others. Still, with the experience of these four years, we should at least have learned that foreign policy cannot be conducted under the pretense that we have no enemies in the world—or at any rate none whose enmity we have not merited by our own conduct. For it was this idea more than anything else, perhaps, that led the Carter administration into disaster abroad and overwhelming defeat at home.

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Pity the Poor Russians?

Walter Laqueur

TOWARD the end of World War I, Joseph Conrad wrote to an American friend that he was greatly worried about the future of his native Poland. He recalled that one evening in August 1914 he had spoken to a small group of Poles attached to the university and political life of Cracow. "Have no illusions!" he had had the courage to tell them. "If anybody has got to be sacrificed in this war, it will be you. If there is any salvation to be found it is only in your own breasts, it is only by the force of your inner life that you will be able to resist the rottenness of Russia and the soullessness of Germany. And this will be your fate forever and ever. For nothing in the world can alter the force of facts." Now four years later, his people's future still appeared dark. Aside from a few choice spirits, the Western world had never taken any interest in Poland. Fine words had been spoken before, and the finer the words, the greater the deception.

Excessive optimism was not among Conrad's outstanding virtues. Actually, an independent Poland did emerge from World War I, and Britain and France did go to war when Poland was invaded twenty years later. But as that war ended, Poland, having been occupied by Germany, passed once again into the Soviet orbit, and Conrad's prediction that nothing would alter "the force of facts" was borne out by the subsequent course of events.

Recent discussions in the West over the future of Poland have all too often betrayed an ignorance of these facts. Politicians and other men of good will have admonished the Russians that it would be against their own best interests to intervene militarily. If they refrained from invading Poland there would be trade, loans, credit, SALT treaties, and good feeling all around. If on the other hand the Russians acted rashly and violently, there would be rearmament, growing tension, and a decisive setback to détente lasting, as the (London) *Guardian* put it, at least ten years. What possible threat could the Polish workers represent to the Soviets that would justify such risks?

The question is reminiscent of Alexander Dubcek's argument for "Communism with a human face" in 1968; what sort of danger could the Czechoslovak experiment constitute to the Soviet Union? When Janos Kadar of Hungary met Dubcek in the small town of Komarno a few days before the invasion, he asked Dubcek almost despairingly: do you really not know the kind of people you are dealing with? Dubcek did not know, but he began to understand when, a short time later, he was summoned to Moscow together with the rest of the Prague leadership. Brezhnev spoke to them unemotionally, without anger. We cannot depend on you any longer, he said. It is immaterial whether anyone is actually threatening us or not, it is a matter of principle. Your border is our border as well. We shall never leave the territory conquered after World War II. That is how it is, that is how it will be from now to eternity. Brezhnev also told Dubcek that he could expect no foreign help. President Johnson had accepted the settlements of Yalta and Potsdam, and anyway America was preoccupied with the Vietnam war. Tito, Ceauşescu, and Berlinguer would protest, but what of it? They did not amount to much. The Russians would have had to invade even at the risk of war. But there was no such risk.*

When Brezhnev said he could no longer depend on the Czechs, he was not referring to the military situation; nor in invoking principle was he thinking of ideological purity. He was talking, quite simply, about political survival. By the same token, in 1980 the Russians could not accept the events in Poland, could not accept any undermining of the leaders approved by them, could not accept the emergence of new political forces like independent trade unions that loosened the dictatorship of the party and the hold of the political police, and could not accept political concessions or other signs of weakness. All this amounted to subversion, and it was far more dangerous than any military threat. For if unchecked, the "Polish disease" would sooner or later infest the entire Soviet bloc.

The Soviet leaders being cautious and patient

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* This is based on the account of Zdenek Mlynar, the Czech leader, who participated in most of the meetings (*Nightfrost in Prague*, 1980).

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men, they hesitated over the use of force in 1968. According to Willy Brandt, only a small majority in the Politburo was in favor of the invasion; other sources have reported that not only Kosygin and Ponomarov were against it, but even Suslov.* Brezhnev, however, predicted that Western reaction to the invasion would be feeble and short-lived. He was right. The invasion took place on August 20, 1968. A few days later, the former French premier Michel Debré went on record with his revealing *petite phrase*—just because an accident takes place does not mean the street should be closed to traffic altogether. One month later Couve de Murville, the then premier, made an official declaration in a similar vein. Within five months France had indicated a willingness to double its trade with the Soviet Union. Subsequently French and West German ministers went to Moscow. By the end of 1969 Czechoslovakia had been forgotten. At a meeting in Brussels in December 1969, the NATO ministers announced their eagerness to resume multilateral and bilateral contacts with the Soviet Union. German *Ostpolitik* and the American policy of détente went into high gear. The Western Communist parties which had registered their protest again normalized relations with the Soviet Union.

IN RETROSPECT, the Soviet leaders lost some six to twelve months in their dealings with the non-Communist world—or, to be precise, with the West; Third World countries did not care in the first place about these internal European affairs. There was a decent interval, then, shorter than for a death in the family, and not exactly a deterrent to similar action in the future.

To be sure, the Soviets could not be certain they would get off as easily in 1981 as they had thirteen years earlier: the U.S., for one, did not appear so eager this time to reopen a dialogue with a view toward strengthening détente. The prospective European reaction to an invasion, on the other hand, could be predicted from the beginning: Poland (it would be said) was after all part of the Soviet empire, and there was nothing the West Europeans could do about it. As with Afghanistan, a Soviet military takeover of Poland would be characterized as a defensive action, and no cause for alarm.

Indeed, it might even be blamed on the Poles. Thus, when the crisis first erupted Karsten Voigt, a parliamentary spokesman on foreign affairs of the German Social Democratic party, wrote in the party organ, *Vorwaerts*, "Revolutionary crises [in Eastern Europe] which lead to violent conflict hinder the long-range reform process and even foster a hardening of attitudes and reactions against the process of democratization and humanization." It is curious to see a left-wing socialist responding so unsympathetically to a spontaneous uprising by the working class. In any case, Voigt's point would be more convincing if evidence existed for that "long-range reform process" of which he speaks, or at least a reasonable hope of some future "process of democratization and humanization."

But it was not only on the Left that a reserved attitude was expressed toward the aspirations of the Poles. Thus the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*:

> Poland's history has more than once taken a tragic course, and often the Poles themselves have contributed to the tragedy by overestimating their possibilities. What is going to happen if the Poles do not recognize the limits set for them by their big neighbors? This troublesome question cannot be avoided. Many Poles tend to see in this concern only the fear of the West that its peace and calm may be disturbed. But their battle for more freedom has a dynamism of its own, and many victims will be sacrificed in vain if the workers do not try to insure that which has already been achieved.

The Poles, in other words, should have been satisfied with the Hungarian model: strictly limited reform, strictly limited freedom. But Hungary is not very enticing these days, and even if it were, there would still be some misguided people in Eastern Europe striving for more freedom. It could be said that revolutionary movements in Eastern Europe are doomed to failure, and therefore should not be launched in the first place. But this is the counsel of despair. The fight against tyranny will never be successful unless daring people engage in a seemingly hopeless struggle. Even from a purely "reformist" point of view —*pace* Conrad—the struggle of the Polish workers makes sense, for how could they ever find out how much freedom they could gain within the system unless they were willing to undertake forays into the twilight zone?

This leads back to the crucial question facing the Soviet leadership: what concessions are possible without endangering the system? The answer in broad outline has been known for a long time. Economic reforms are permissible within limits, and very minor political concessions *may* be possible. But major political concessions—like free trade unions—are incompatible with the system. Nor can the system exist without strict censorship and such other means of control as the political police.

Thus the concessions already made by the Polish leadership, under great pressure, will in the long run have to be revoked. Whether this should be accomplished at once, by way of military intervention, or whether it would be better to wait a month or perhaps even a year in order to achieve a more elegant solution—by discrediting the unions, by winning over some of the leaders and isolating others, by having the job done by the Polish party and army with only a minimum of outside

* Jiri Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia 1968: Anatomy of a Decision* (1979).

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help—these are tactical questions, subject to review, on which different answers may be forthcoming. But only one answer can be given to the question of whether the Communist system can coexist in the long run with the achievements of the Polish workers in 1980, and that answer is No.

EVEN before the Polish crisis had reached its climax, it was becoming fashionable in many Western circles to claim that the Soviet empire was in an advanced stage of decomposition. Writing in the *Economist*, David Watt, director of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, noted that "objectively speaking" the position of the Soviet leaders was highly unsatisfactory:

> The Soviet economy is in extreme difficulties in almost all departments. Soviet energy resources are overstrained. The East European empire is restless for all the old reasons, but an edge has been added to its discontent by the appearance of even more glaring economic inefficiencies in the system. Meanwhile, the Russian attempt to establish a dominant position on a global scale is not showing any great signs of success. Soviet ideology is increasingly regarded as irrelevant, if not actually dangerous, by the Third World. Cuba, Vietnam, and South Yemen are the only unequivocally reliable countries. . . . Moreover, the Soviet army is now impaled on the horns of an extremely uncomfortable military dilemma in Afghanistan itself and must either commit really enormous forces to a brutal campaign, thereby attracting the hatred and contempt of the world at large, or give up the attempt to pacify the country.

Watt further drew attention to the shadow of a hostile and rapidly modernizing China, and concluded that Brezhnev was bound to have considerable difficulty composing a satisfactory progress report for the 26th Party Congress.

After reading a dozen such accounts one might well begin to feel sorry for a group of leaders who seem to be surviving by the skin of their teeth. But "objectively speaking" it is not at all clear that the Soviet leaders are in a state of near collapse. There is no reason to assume that the Soviet Union will ever have to commit "really enormous forces" in Afghanistan. They can wait, five years or ten years if necessary; resistance will probably dwindle much earlier. During that time the Soviet Union will not attract the "hatred and contempt of the world at large." Even inside the Muslim sphere, which is to say the countries most directly affected, some already justify the Soviet invasion while others do not greatly care, and still others, though worried, do not dare to speak out (let alone act) forcefully for fear of provoking Russian displeasure. It is one thing for a Third World country to pick a quarrel with the U.S., another, far more serious, to be at loggerheads with the USSR.

In Europe there have been strong declarations that the Soviet invasion was "unacceptable," and an encouraging show of solidarity at Madrid. But at the same time, business has gone on as usual: transfer of technology, and talks about massive credits, spearheaded as usual by France, whose trade with the Soviet Union has gone up by more than 50 percent since the invasion. In the final analysis, this is what counts. Canada resumed wheat deliveries to Russia in late November. A German consortium has been negotiating with the Russians for a $10-billion contract. And the United States is not in a good position to blame the Germans, since the Caterpillar tractor company received a license from the Carter administration to sell $1 billion in equipment to Russia for laying a natural-gas pipeline. In short, those who had instituted sanctions were soon competing with one another to break them. The question is therefore what "unacceptable" really means; very likely, it means nothing at all.

So much for the repercussions of Afghanistan. If the Soviet leaders come one day to regret their decision to intervene, it will only be because the invasion will turn out not to have been necessary. To speak about their action as a disaster for them, or a festering sore, or "their" Vietnam, is ludicrous. Invading Afghanistan has not done the Russians much good, but it has not done them much harm either.

IF FOR David Watt the Soviets have not had great success in their attempt to establish a dominant global position, some American observers, going further, think that "the Soviets have lost ground in the last few years and are arguably now more isolated than they were two decades ago."* This, if true, would be welcome news. The authors provide supportive evidence: according to their count, the Soviets have gained influence in eleven countries in the last decade (Afghanistan, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Libya, Cape Verde, and South Yemen). But in seven others they have lost influence (Egypt, Indonesia, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, and Equatorial Guinea). "These two lists roughly balance each other."

The lists are curious: the former omits Syria, Russia's main satellite in the Middle East; half a dozen African countries including Benin, Madagascar, and Congo-Brazzaville; the Seychelles, which have moved much closer to the Soviet Union over the last decade; not to mention Libya's takeover bids in Central Africa. And who could seriously argue that Soviet influence in the Caribbean is now weaker than it was a decade ago? Or that Soviet influence has not grown in India? Or that Soviet military power has not been translated into political power in Europe during the last decade?

Even more remarkable is the list of alleged Soviet losses. The reference to Equatorial Guinea is

* Barry R. Posen and Stephen W. van Evera, "Overarming and Underwhelming," *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1980.

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surely a mistake; the authors must have had some other country in mind. The Soviet position in Sudan, Iraq, and Indonesia is about as strong (or weak) as it was ten years ago. That leaves Somalia and Egypt.

While the Soviets have obviously not succeeded in *every* country they have tried to influence or control, the lists do not balance each other, "roughly" or in any other way. The real Soviet defeats have been China and Yugoslavia, but these occurred twenty and thirty years ago, when the global balance was very different from what it is now. A repeat of Yugoslavia—a break that did not spark an invasion—would be quite unthinkable today; everyone in Eastern Europe knows it and acts accordingly. Watt admonishes us that "The American electors still have to be told firmly by their political leaders . . . that impotence is the normal state of individual actors in international affairs and one in which Russians find themselves quite as often as do Americans." Impotence the normal state of affairs—Fidel Castro would be vastly amused.

Posen and van Evera have persuaded themselves that the world situation is much better than we tend to think because the Soviets have suffered so many setbacks. Other observers have reached the same conclusion, but from opposite premises: the Russians, as they see it, *have* made progress, but precisely for this reason they feel today less isolated and more relaxed. Thus the author of a Council on Foreign Relations report on "Soviet-American Relations in the 1980's" writes:

> Changes in Western Europe itself, symbolized by the advances of the Italian and French Communist parties, should make Moscow's 60-year image of "capitalist encirclement" less threatening.

The factual basis on which such optimism rests is suspect, for the French and Italian Communists have not made any noticeable progress in recent years. But that anyone would think that such progress could contribute to a "stable world order" is disquieting, to say the least.

Of all the misconceptions about the Soviet Union, and its relation to the West, the idea of symmetry is the most frequently encountered by far. An assistant editor of the Washington *Post* wrote recently:

> Empire, theirs and ours, is threatened by at least three new realities in the world. Our old friends, the Europeans and the Japanese, have come close to achieving economic parity with us and are delighted to compete head-to-head with their former guardian Uncle Sam. The resource nations, meanwhile, are discovering the strategies for renegotiating the flow of benefits between us and them, a fancy way of saying that the days of cheap oil from the Middle East are gone. Finally, the global operations of multinational corporations are confusing, even obliterating, the old assumption of imperial boundaries. The multinationals' goal is to rationalize the organization of world resources, production, markets; they are most unsentimental about respecting national sovereignty or ideological alliances [November 15, 1980].

These three "new realities" may or may not affect the United States; but in what way do they constitute dangers to the Soviet empire? The notion that Ford, General Motors, and Pepsi Cola do not respect the boundaries of the Soviet bloc betrays an original turn of mind, but this is about all that can be said for it. The fact that Europe and Japan have come close to achieving economic parity with the U.S. is first of all not a fact so far as Japan is concerned, and second of all does not threaten the Soviet Union in any way; the same is true with regard to the increased oil prices, from which the Soviet Union greatly benefits as an exporter. If they were a threat, the Soviet Union would hardly encourage OPEC to raise its prices even higher, as it has been doing for the last eight years. In short, the three threats to the Soviet empire are fantasy.

But it may be worthwhile to dwell a bit longer on these "realities," because they are referred to so often as reasons for America's political decline. It is true that Europe is "coming close" to achieving economic parity, but this has been so ever since it recovered from the ravages of World War II. The ratio between European and American GNP has been virtually unchanged for the last twenty years; to be precise, it has improved in the EEC's favor by about 5 percent between 1960 and 1980. There has been no dramatic shift in the economic balance of power, not even an undramatic one. And even if the EEC had overtaken the U.S., this would still be a fact of very limited political significance. The EEC, unlike the U.S., is not one country, it is not even a closely knit political and military alliance, but a customs union which has been unable to move beyond this stage to greater unity and common action.

To provide another, even more striking example of the limits of economic power: recent history has seen a famous case of stormy growth—Japan. In 1960, its GNP was about 40 percent that of the Soviet Union (whose population is more than twice as large). Today the ratio is about 85 percent, and if current trends continue Japan may overtake the Soviet Union in a few years. But in political and military terms these figures are almost meaningless. The Soviet Union is a superpower, whereas Japan's prosperity rests on uncertain foundations; it would collapse if the supply of raw materials were cut off or if other countries were to adopt protectionist measures. Japan is not a major power even in the Asian context. To quote a recent article by Raymond Aron: "Neither a superior standard of living nor a higher per-capita output can counterbalance tanks or missiles."

Aron's article appeared under the title, "Soviet

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Hegemonism Year One." Following Solzhenitsyn, Aron had originally wanted to call his piece "The Blinding of the West." Its pessimism is in stark contrast to the Panglossian mood of the American and British authors quoted above. Aron is not unmindful of the weaknesses of the Soviet bloc; his fear is that unless present trends are reversed, European policy will come to be dictated by the fact that to the East lies the biggest army in the world, and to the South the Arabs can open and close the spigots at will. True, the Americans still have enough military power to make the Soviets think twice, but they no longer have the means to bring pressure on their own allies. Thus the Europeans will be inclined to stay on good terms with the Soviet Union at almost any price; if American troops should be withdrawn from Europe, docility will turn into servility.

In the absence of a common Western strategy and a firm will, the Soviets, as Aron sees it, will continue to manipulate anti-Western forces in the Third World, continue to provoke revolutions when circumstances permit, continue to buy Western technology, establish bases, and drive a wedge between America and the Europeans. Aron finds no sense of urgency in the United States in the face of this great peril, no readiness to undertake necessary crash programs. And he sees a general unwillingness to take Soviet declarations seriously, just as there was no readiness to take *Mein Kampf* seriously in the 1930's.

Aron's fears are rooted in historical experience, in present-day realities, and in an overall vision very much in contrast to the wishful thinking and false theories of convergence with which we have become so well acquainted in the West. There may be better reasons for hope than he has to offer, but these have nothing to do with fairy tales about Soviet weakness. Nor shall we be saved by a split in the Soviet leadership between the "modernist pragmatists" on the one hand and the "revolutionary ideologists" on the other. This notion has been peddled for decades, but it has not become more accurate with time. Every Soviet leader is a modernist in the sense that he prefers a third-generation computer to an old-fashioned abacus. Nor is there reason to believe that any Soviet leader, however highly placed, regularly studies or is guided in action by the "Critique of Hegelian Philosophy of Law," "Empirocriticism," or any other such classic of Marxism-Leninism. But modernism and pragmatism are not synonyms for greater freedom, nor streamlining the same thing as democratization. The idea that modernizing the Soviet economy will also liberalize Soviet society is nonsense; on the contrary, modern methods of propaganda and censorship make it easier to control society more effectively.

A RADICAL new departure in Soviet policy should not be expected as the result either of economic stagnation or of changes in the leadership. That the Soviet economy is in bad shape was admitted by Brezhnev himself as far back as November 1978. But the extent of the failure did seem to come as a surprise; the Central Statistics Administration was suddenly given instructions to cease publishing the usual comparison with last year's output. It is also generally accepted that the dismal picture is not just the fault of several crop failures and unseasonal bad weather; the weather is never very good in large parts of the Soviet Union. Soviet growth was 0.7 percent in 1979 (i.e., lower than the birth rate) and not much more substantial in 1980. (The official Soviet figures are 2 percent for 1979, 3.8 percent for 1980, and a projected 3.4 percent for 1981).

The prospects for the years to come are about the same, because of a variety of factors including the decline in productivity, lower investment, higher raw-material costs, overcentralization, and overbureaucratization. According to the next five-year plan, the targets of which have just been published, output will rise by 30 percent; this is the most modest plan so far, but the aim will not be reached. The situation in the other Comecon countries is the same, and the prospects even worse.

There is a curious lag in comprehension: by the time the Western media woke up to the fact that the Hungarians were not faring too badly under "Goulash Communism," and that the East Germans were doing even better, their prosperity had come to an end. In Eastern Europe (as in the West), 1976 was still a fairly good year, but since then there has been a steady decline. The prospects are worse there because, unlike the Soviet Union, these countries have to import most of the raw materials needed for their industry, and they cannot export enough to pay for the higher prices. Eastern Europe faces more than just one grim winter: fixed prices are too low, and the greatest demand is precisely for those goods which are scarce. A more rational price system is needed, yet at this stage a seemingly technical economic issue turns into a major political problem: if prices were to rise as much as they should, there would be stiff popular resistance, and widespread dissatisfaction among the working class is not something to be lightly dismissed. It is unlikely that Hungarian or Czech workers would strike, as the Poles did, but their unhappiness would certainly express itself in slower and more careless work as well as in absenteeism—in short, in a further decline in productivity.

All this must be a matter of concern to the Soviet leadership because their political system rests on the assumption, endlessly repeated, that the Communist economy, being more rational and not subject to the vagaries of the market mechanism, is vastly superior in performance to Western economies, both capitalist and mixed. Soviet citizens have not exactly been spoiled with consumer

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goods, but they have become accustomed to a steady, albeit small, rise in the standard of living. If this comes to a halt, the ideological legitimacy of the system is undermined. Until a few years ago economic failures were still being explained by reference to the ravages of World War II, an argument that for obvious reasons could not be used indefinitely. At present the most frequent official explanation for shortages is the need to devote a high percentage of the national income to defense in view of the feverish rearmament of Western and Maoist imperialists and revanchists. This involves Soviet propaganda in certain contradictions, because according to official statistics the Soviet Union devotes only a tiny part of its budget to defense (about 17 billion rubles). But the politicians rightly assume that no one believes the official figures anyway, and hence, depending on the occasion, they can stipulate a very large or a very small expenditure on defense.

The picture is not entirely bleak: through large-scale sales of arms, gold, petroleum, and natural gas, the Soviet Union is earning enough hard currency to pay not only for the import of grain but also for other purchases in critical areas of the economy to prevent major breakdowns. And although the state of the Soviet economy is unsatisfactory, to say the least, the rest of the world, excluding only a few OPEC countries, is not in brilliant shape either. Finally, even if the economy were in much worse condition, there is no reason to believe that this would compel the Soviet leaders to turn inward or to pursue a policy of truly peaceful coexistence with the rest of the world.

As WITH the economy, so with the emergence of new men in the party presidium. Power will soon pass—is already passing—from the hands of Brezhnev and company to colleagues only a few years their juniors, and there is likely to be a second change of the guard later in the decade. But the idea that the heirs will inaugurate a Dubcek-like "Moscow spring" seems very far-fetched indeed. Czechoslovakia—like Poland—has a democratic tradition which is absent in Russia, and in the Eastern European countries Communism is still considered a foreign implant.

Four years ago I tried in these pages to explain why it was wrong to attach undue hopes of a softer international line to the successors of Brezhnev: younger people, more often than not, are actually more enterprising than their elders, more willing to accept risks; in contrast to their predecessors, they have yet to prove themselves; and the fact that Soviet domestic problems are so difficult to deal with may in itself contribute to a stronger emphasis on foreign policy.*

Other factors too may be adduced as evidence of the likely perpetuation of the status quo. The leading stratum in the Soviet Union is highly conservative in outlook. It knows how to manage the present institutions, and would be lost trying to run a multi-organizational system in which decision-making was spread more widely. Furthermore, a closed society of this kind needs enemies to justify the maintenance of dictatorial control; China alone does not suffice in this context.

It would of course be foolish to claim that the Soviet system will *never* change. Predictions about totalitarian regimes are so difficult because our experience with them is limited. The only known way to overthrow them—as in the cases of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy—has been through total defeat in war. Spain became democratic within a short time after Franco's death, but then it never really was totalitarian. True, one should resist the temptation to overrate the monolithic character of any system, as events in China have shown in recent years. But if in politics anything is *a priori* possible, one must also ask how likely it is. One could, in theory, envisage a number of scenarios: a deep split in the Politburo along either personal or substantive lines, or both, spilling over into the Central Committee, filtering down to the rank and file of the party, leading to the emergence of factions as a more or less permanent feature of the regime. A pluralism of sorts would thus come into being, and there would be more freedom inside the party, though not in society at large. This, in turn, could lead to wider concessions and reforms. All this is possible, and Western policy-makers should certainly not rule it out. But they also cannot base their plans on such optimistic assumptions—if only because a greater degree of "inner-party democracy" would not necessarily make for greater restraint in Soviet foreign policy.

The answer to the question of whether Raymond Aron's pessimism is justified, however, depends only in part on the Soviet Union's intentions. Even if one's worst fears were confirmed, the Russians would not necessarily be strong enough to pursue their aims relentlessly or to the end. The regime has been showing serious weaknesses and it is undergoing crises of various kinds; it may now be infinitely stronger militarily than it was thirty years ago, but politically it has become more vulnerable. By the very inner logic through which it had to expand after 1945, the system has generated contradictions and conflicts which may ultimately contain it far more effectively than any Western policies. But for years to come the system will still tend to expand through its own momentum, unless it is faced with determined resistance. And this leads us back to the condition of the West.

THE U.S. and its European allies seem to be close to a showdown. There have been ritual incantations of Atlantic solidarity even of late, but in fact the allies have been drift-

* "Russia—Beyond Brezhnev," August 1977.

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ing apart. The Polish crisis may lead to a temporary closing of ranks, or, alternatively, it may precipitate a confrontation which would have occurred anyway sooner or later. A certain measure of discord inevitably exists in every alliance and this one is no exception: Europe and the United States frequently compete on the world market; the U.S. is a superpower with global interests, while Europeans think about world politics almost exclusively in regional terms; the U.S. is the leader, or at the very least the senior partner, in the alliance, and this, of course, is bound to produce some resentment on the part of the junior partners.

If this were all, there would be no reason to worry about the alliance. But there is more to the malaise: while Europeans have criticized American leadership for being weak and inconsistent, they would have rejected strong and consistent American leadership even more emphatically. European leaders now claim that Americans exaggerate the Soviet danger, and that even if the Russians misbehave from time to time, attempts to "punish" them are futile and self-defeating. Furthermore, they argue, most future conflicts are likely to occur in Third World areas and will have to be faced on the political and economic, not on the military, level. From here they proceed to a number of non sequiturs: that Europe should play a stronger and more independent role in world affairs (Giscard d'Estaing); that a major defense effort on Europe's part is undesirable at this time partly because it would irritate the Russians and be harmful to détente but also because of the economic recession; and that the U.S. should lean on Israel to insure Western access to the oil of the Middle East.

Underlying all this is the belief, seldom explicitly articulated but in fact widespread well beyond the extreme Left, that if it were not for the (largely irrational) antipathy between the two superpowers (which is mainly the fault of the United States), the world would be an infinitely safer place. Seen in this light, the conflict between the superpowers has nothing (or very little) to do with Europe. And if the U.S. should persevere in its belligerent attitudes, the Europeans would be well advised to go their own way between the two warring factions, trying to work for reconciliation or, if this should be of no avail, opting for a unilateral détente. "The Americans must not think they are in another decade," says François Poncet, the French Foreign Minister. "This is 1980 with a Europe which has rebuilt its forces, which counts in the world because its diplomacy is taking more definite shape each day."

In the United States, resentment has grown about the allies' lack of support; there have been charges of betrayal, and most recently a new conflict about sharing the burden of defense. NATO decided on a 3-percent increase (in real terms) in defense spending, but most European governments have made it known that they are not able or willing to meet this goal. (Among the few countries which will increase defense spending are Norway and France, but France is no longer an active member of NATO.)

Europeans point to the fact, frequently overlooked by American critics, that since 1970 Western Europe has increased military spending relative to the U.S. and that since all European countries (except Britain) have the draft, their defense budgets are not swollen by major allocations for the salaries and pensions needed by an all-volunteer army. All this is true, and until the U.S. reintroduces the draft its exhortations will sound somewhat hollow. But there is something askew in Europe's reacting only to what America has been doing (or has failed to do), for the simple reason that if there is a threat to Europe, it does not come from the other shore of the Atlantic. Compared with the Soviet Union, the Europeans have fallen behind. There is a profound inconsistency between the European aspiration to pursue an independent policy and the unwillingness to create the prerequisites for such a policy, and this at a time when it would be relatively safe to do so, for the Soviet Union is for the moment occupied elsewhere, unable to exert maximum pressure on Western Europe. These favorable circumstances will not last forever.

The inconsistency is explained in Europe with reference to the bad economic situation. The facts about Britain are known and need not be reiterated. But even Germany, the classic country of the *Wirtschaftswunder*, has shown a major current-account deficit in 1980, and this is not likely to improve much in the next few years. The rising price of oil has reduced German GNP by 4 percent; while the first oil shock was absorbed after some initial difficulties, it now seems impossible to export enough to redress the balance. The same holds for almost every European country, even Sweden, whose deficit is twice as large as last year; again the main cause is the inability to increase exports. France is running a trade-balance loss of $12-15 billion a year; Italy, $15-20 billion.

These figures would be less threatening if it were not virtually certain that the price of oil will rise even further and that exports cannot possibly keep pace. Industrial production in France and Italy has been down by 4-5 percent. In Western Europe as a whole, an upward swing from recession is not expected before the end of 1981, and a lasting recovery cannot be expected at all in the near future.

It is argued in Europe, as in the United States, that there should be no increase in defense spending while other public services have to be cut. Furthermore, it is said, defense spending is always inflationary, and inflation inhibits growth. The argument is not beyond suspicion. In non-Communist Europe, inflation has for a number of years been highest in Italy, Spain, and Iceland. Iceland

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happens to have no army at all, and defense spending in the two Mediterranean countries is 2 percent or less. As for the argument of guns versus butter, it too is grossly oversimplified (quite apart from the fact that Europe suffers from a chronic overproduction of butter), and even if it were true it would only mean that one were faced with a choice between political priorities. And this takes us to the heart of the difference between the United States and many Europeans.

Michael Foot, the new leader of the British Labor party, certainly seems to regard the common peril as largely imaginary, and so do many political leaders in Benelux and Scandinavia as well as some members of Germany's ruling Social Democratic party. In a more moderate form such a view is now establishment opinion: détente *is* divisible; if the "relaxation of tensions" in Europe seems to work to the advantage of the Europeans it should be pursued; if Europeans were to follow the American example (post-Afghanistan) and take a tough line, "the cold blast would immediately kill off the delicate growth of relations between Europe and the satellite countries of the Eastern bloc" (David Watt). Some have even expressed the belief that there would be a good chance of Eastern Europe becoming liberalized if Western Europe were to loosen its ties with American policy. These delusions have taken some hard knocks since the Polish crisis erupted, but sooner or later they will resurface.

That a policy of selective détente *can* be pursued, goes without saying. It is more difficult to point to the advantages it would bring to the West. The "delicate growth of relations" has been damaged not because of anything the Western Europeans did, or refrained from doing, but because of Poland. This is what the Russians have in mind when they accuse the Poles of "sabotaging détente," and some Western Europeans silently agree with them: why did the Poles have to demand so much, thus obstructing the "delicate growth"? The real issue has been stated earlier: if the Soviets were to make any substantial concessions in Eastern Europe, things would get hopelessly out of control, because the great majority of the people prefer Western ways to what they have been taught by the Soviets. Either West European leaders do not know this, and thus are guilty of shortsightedness, or they know it and are merely cynical. Perhaps the "maximum freedom in Eastern Europe compatible with the maintenance of the overall status quo"—their stated aim—really means that Western European leaders are willing to put up with *minimum* political freedom provided only the Soviets leave them alone.

SIMILAR questions arise in connection with another issue, perhaps the only one on which there is almost full agreement in Western Europe—the urgent need for the U.S. to change its policy toward Israel. The argument runs as follows: there will be no lasting peace in the Middle East unless the Arab-Israeli tangle is resolved. To quote David Watt again: "The settlement of the Palestinian conflict would do more to secure Western oil supplies than any other single development that could be devised."

It is unlikely that Mr. Watt is ignorant of the Iraqi-Iranian war or that he believes the Palestinian issue caused it; it can be assumed that he is aware of the many conflicts in the Arab world—between Saudi Arabia and Libya, between Syria and Iraq, between Jordan and Syria, between Libya and Tunisia, between Algeria and Morocco, and between Egypt and everybody else—to name only the major ones. And it can be taken for granted that he knows Middle Eastern oil is not located in Israel or near its borders. How then explain the belief—which also has adherents in the United States—that progress toward a settlement of the Palestinian issue will secure Western oil supplies?

Watt, at least, is willing to admit in this connection that "the Europeans have their own axes to grind, some of them not particularly creditable." Europe wants oil; nothing else greatly matters. But in what way would the establishment of a Palestinian state secure the oil supply? If the experiment were successful, it would be a blessing to Israel and the Palestinians. It would also mark the end of whatever still remains of Arab solidarity; the only tie holding the Arab states together, however imperfectly, would disappear. This would put the present oil-producing regimes in greater danger than before, as all the inter-Arab squabbles now suppressed by the Arab-Israeli conflict would emerge with a vengeance. If on the other hand the experiment should fail, and the establishment of a PLO state brought not peace but further war, perhaps on a wider scale, the security of oil supplies would certainly not improve.

All this is so obvious that doubts arise as to the motives of the Palestine-Firsters in Europe and America: why their single-minded concentration on what has become a sideshow? Is it that they just want to demonstrate their political support to their suppliers and clients without necessarily meaning what they say? Alas, there is every reason to believe that many European leaders genuinely do believe in their own arguments.

POLITICAL judgment does not exist in a vacuum, it is affected by a great many extraneous influences, by emotions, by the presence of danger, and, generally speaking, by the existential situation of an individual or a group. We would not turn to persons kept as hostages by hijackers for advice on a general strategy to combat terrorism. However intelligent the hostage, however strong his nerves, his judgment would necessarily be clouded by his experience. The sensation of being kept hostage has to some extent spread in Europe, and for this reason European political

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judgment has to be approached with caution. There are the underlying factors of Europe's geographical situation, its dependence on imported oil and on trade with the OPEC countries, and its military weakness via-à-vis the Soviet Union, but above all there is the inability of Europe to act forcefully and in unison. Such weakness is not foreordained: Cuba's geopolitical situation is certainly not advantageous and its economic situation is lamentable; the same is true of Albania. But the governments of these two countries, whatever their record in other respects, have, unlike Europe, shown fortitude and determination in adverse conditions. Even if a country (or a continent) finds itself in a state of weakness, there is usually a way to lessen its dependence and to enlarge its freedom of maneuver.

Yet instead of doing what is necessary to become a stronger force in world politics, the Europeans seem to fall ever more deeply into a posture of dependency. If West Germany, on top of its reliance on Persian Gulf oil, should provide a multibillion-dollar credit to the Soviet Union, as the result of which about 30 percent of its gas supply will come from the East, this is bound to result in even greater dependence, and the same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for other European countries. Such dependence could be justified if there were no alternative. But the other possibilities, such as the purchase of North Sea gas or the liquification of coal on a greater scale, have not even been seriously explored. According to the experts, these alternatives exist and may not be more expensive than Soviet gas pumped over thousands of miles from Siberia. But even if gas from non-Soviet sources were more expensive, the supply would be secure—and this should be the decisive criterion. Against this it is argued that supplying pipe and other equipment to the East would create jobs for a few thousand workers in German factories that might otherwise face difficulties. Besides, it is said, the Soviets have always kept business and politics strictly apart and have never tried to apply economic pressure to Western Europe.*

Yet if this was so in the past, it was because the Russians did not have the necessary leverage; they will have it in the future if deals of such magnitude go through. Even during the Afghanistan crisis several minor European countries claimed they could not take any retaliatory measures because the Soviets might stop their gas supply. How much larger will the danger loom in the future! Indeed, the Soviet leaders may not even have to threaten; Europe will automatically adjust its behavior in exact proportion to the degree of its dependence.

These then are some of the bones of contention between America and its allies. The question of defense, important as it is, is not the decisive issue, for here room exists for bargaining and give-and-take. The decisive issue is the growth in Europe of a hostage mentality, conscious and unconscious, which manifests itself in various ways. Students of terrorism are familiar with the "Stockholm syndrome," according to which captives gradually come to identify with those who have abducted them. Another term is needed to describe the fascinating new European syndrome: those affected begin by exaggerating the extent of their misfortune but then persuade themselves that they are perfectly capable of dealing with their captors, real or imaginary, being their equals in every respect. This is the real problem and where it is concerned there is little room for bargaining.

WHAT should the new Reagan administration tell the allies, and what should it say to the Soviets? The French have been suggesting that "between a strong America and a Europe guaranteed of its power and its role there should now be established a dialogue." But even if we assume that America is strong and Europe guaranteed of its power, which unfortunately cannot be taken for granted, it still is not clear who speaks for Europe. "We have ceased to be provincials exercising only limited regional responsibilities," writes Michel Crozier in a new book; "we are entering a game of five in which China, Japan, and Europe join the two giants—or six with the Muslim countries."

Great are the powers of auto-suggestion; the idea of a multilateral world order seems to be undergoing a revival. America, whatever its other weaknesses, has one government and one Secretary of State. Europe has nine and soon may have eleven who fail to see eye to eye even on the question of agricultural subsidies. They may occasionally agree on political issues, but more often they decide only to be undecided, resolve to be irresolute, as Churchill said of Baldwin. A dialogue, needless to say, can be conducted among an unlimited number of people, but the purpose of dialogue is not just talk but common action. "We want a strong America," the French say, because "otherwise we cannot be intermediaries between the two superpowers, nor can we maneuver between them." It is a generous offer, but why should America avail itself of it? Relations between the two superpowers are best regulated in direct contact, and if America has decided to strengthen its defenses, the main purpose is not to enable France to act as a mediator.

In a dialogue with Europe it should be established what Europeans intend to do about the various dangers facing them. If there is no clarity in this respect and no wish for common action, a new "Year of Europe" would be a waste of time. If Eu-

* The Germans were encouraged by the New York *Times* in the middle of the Polish crisis to conclude the deal: "The Soviet government has an excellent record of honoring economic commitments, a record that it presumably would not casually violate to meet some short-term political objective." The editorial was correct—the Soviets would not *casually* violate a commitment, and certainly not for a *short-term* objective.

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ropean governments believe that they will survive the coming storms by offering loans, credits, and technical assistance to the Soviet Union, and, generally speaking, by taking a low profile, they will no longer need an Atlantic alliance; on the contrary, it would be an embarrassment.

In recent years American officials (and Senators and Congressmen) have spent countless hours with their European counterparts trying to persuade them that they have to make a greater defense effort. These meetings, while motivated by good will, have been politically and psychologically counter-productive. America cannot and should not forever bring pressure on its allies in Europe. Ideally, a new political arrangement should be concluded, but this may be impossible. Failing this, a division of labor between America and Europe would be desirable. America could follow the French example and back those European policies with which it agrees, withdrawing its support from those of which it disapproves. That this would weaken the alliance, at least temporarily, goes without saying. But the alliance unfortunately has been weakened in any case and nothing will be gained by pretending that all is well. It will be weakened further unless an attempt is made to put it on a firmer basis; and this cannot be done without taking risks.

What is there to be said to the Soviets? Kevin Close, an American correspondent in Moscow, writing soon after the elections, rightly drew attention to the "quadrennial euphoria" in Soviet-American relations, accompanied by low-cost (or no-cost) acts of friendliness on the part of the Soviets. No transition period in Washington is complete without encouraging noises from Moscow about a new breakthrough on arms talks, ushering in a new era of cooperation and trust between the two superpowers. Nor is it all make-believe: Soviet foreign policy has always been more effective during periods of détente than while waging cold war. Such expressions have become as much a part of the political ritual as the *paso doble* at a bullfight.

But there are also variations. In 1981 the Soviet leadership faces a new administration no longer weakened by the post-Vietnam trauma; the Atlantic alliance may be in disarray, but the Soviet camp is not in top form either. Following Afghanistan there has been the Polish crisis, and there may be more conflicts ahead. There has been tough talk in Washington. Above all, the Soviet leaders will want to know whether the new administration in Washington is capable of taking the unpopular decisions needed to strengthen America by lessening its dependence on foreign oil and by increasing its conventional military strength. A government uttering threats but afraid to bring back the draft or to reduce excessive U.S. reliance on imported oil will not impress the Soviets.

By contrast, an administration willing to do these things could bring about a normalization of relations with the Soviet Union. It would be rash to envisage a lasting improvement, for sooner or later there will be new trouble in either Eastern Europe or the Third World. But the temptation for the Soviet Union to take advantage of a critical situation might be reduced if the Russians knew that any such attempt on their part would be countered by an American move at a place inconvenient to the USSR. This, however, involves not only a great deal of resolution on Washington's part but also a political and military capability which has to be rebuilt as quickly as possible.

The Soviet leaders are not unreasonable people. From a position of equal strength and resolution it may be possible to reach wide agreement with them; from a position of inferiority—nothing at all.

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Why Madame Bovary Couldn't Make Love in the Concrete

Joseph Epstein

Poor Madame Bovary, one understands and sympathizes with her condition. It is very awkward—if not so awkward as that of the freshman student at my university who, in a term paper, spotted the difficulty when he wrote: "Madame Bovary's problem is that she cannot make love in the concrete." How could he know that the word concrete is itself an abstraction, a by now quite stale metaphor, and one used in his unpracticed hand to hilarious effect? How could he know that for professors one of the few pleasures in grading student papers is that of writing zippy comments in the margins, and that he had set up his professor exquisitely? In his unconscious trope rendering Emma Bovary frigid in the concrete, the possibilities he provided for marginal comment—and comedy—were not practically but altogether boundless. Only the greatest restraint prevents me from trying out twenty or thirty such comments here myself.

This error could have been no more than a slight slip, but I believe something else is entailed. Certainly no uneducated person would ever have made it. It had to be learned, acquired; it would not have been available outside the classroom. It is an error of the kind of which only the poorly educated are susceptible. As Orwell once said that some opinions are so stupid that only intellectuals could hold them, so some contemporary language is so misguided that only the college-educated could use it. Madame Bovary may not be able to make love in the concrete, but many Americans, supposedly educated ones, go her a giant step better and are unable to think in the concrete.

Not that this, or the condition of contemporary language generally, is not often being pointed out, explained, castigated. Of critics of language today there is no paucity. In a modest way, language has become a hot subject. Books about language appear in great number and in varying degrees of seriousness and from various points of view, from Jacques Barzun's *Simple and Direct* to John B. Bremner's *Words on Words* to Willard Espy's *Say It My Way* to Casey Miller and Kate Swift's *Handbook of Nonsexist Writing* to Gyles Brandreth's *The Joy of Lex*. Along with *College English* and other academic journals, two publications for laymen, *Verbatim: The Language Quarterly* and *The Underground Grammarian*, are devoted to the study of contemporary vagaries in the use of language. The criticism of language has become a journalistic occupation, and two steady middlebrow publications, the *Saturday Review* and the New York *Times Magazine*, employ such critics and so does *Esquire*, a more with-it magazine. Like books or movies or theater or dance, language in these publications has become a regular department. Whether this new public concern will soon fade it is difficult to know, but for the moment at least language as a business—if not language itself—seems to be flourishing.

Why? Why have *Esquire*, the *Times Magazine*, the *Saturday Review* all seen fit to install language criticism in their pages at this time? Do their editors feel a missionary earnestness about the disheveled state of English and a concomitant zeal to get Americans writing and speaking carefully again? Do they, as savvy magazine editors are supposed to do, sniff something in the wind? Is the English language truly in a condition of crisis? Or is this freshened interest merely an additional piece of consumer culture overlaid with snobbery—an interest on the order of that in gourmet cookery? Or is it at bottom political, for there are some who argue that custodians of the language go into action when class and caste lines are threatened?

My answer is, probably all of the above, and other reasons beside. True, language is under attack by feminists, by proponents of Black English and bilingualism, by homosexuals, and by a general resurgence of the populist strain in our culture. The rise in interest in language may well reflect this attack and reflect into the bargain a hunger for standards: with all else slipping and changing, let us at least try to keep up the language. It may also reflect a dissatisfaction on the part of a great many people with the quality of their education; they have been educated but they don't feel educated, and a concern for language can be

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seen as a way of renewing one's interest in education. Nor can snobbery be ruled out. Today, when the ownership of a Mercedes, or even of a Chagall, is no longer a guarantee of distinction, perhaps using "hopefully" correctly can separate one from the general middle-class rabble.

But a more interesting question is, Can it be said with any certainty that the quality of language has in recent years fallen off drastically, or even at all? How would one go about answering, let alone proving an answer to, this question? One could, I suppose, cite the rise or fall of scores on SAT examinations in English, but this would probably persuade no one, for there are those who argue that these examinations do no more than test bare competence in punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, and powers of organization; and others who feel these examinations are, as they say, "culturally biased" and who believe therefore that it is the examiners who need to be examined. But if statistical evidence is wanting, literary evidence is not. Nor is literary evidence insignificant on a question that is itself literary.

It does seem unarguable that in public discourse the quality of language is lower than it once was. For decades now, for example, we have not had a President of the United States who has written his own speeches, or has even shown evidence that he could write them if time permitted. Not only the Presidents but their speechwriters have shown themselves incapable of moving the populace by eloquence. This is a long way from the case of Theodore Roosevelt or Woodrow Wilson, both of whom not only could command eloquence but wrote books and even reviewed them. Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson's origins were patrician, to be sure, but this is merely a reminder that careful language is no longer a serious concern of the American upper classes. Edith Wharton, in her memoir, *A Backward Glance*, recalled that it once was. Her own family was very far from being literary—it rather looked down upon living writers—but it nonetheless held the English language in reverence and used it with precision. Careful language, like politeness, Mrs. Wharton writes, was one "of the accepted formulas," one of "the principles of the well-bred." If this was once true of the upper classes, it apparently is no longer, for today formerly upper-class institutions such as Harvard employ teachers with populist views about language: views that hold that whatever language the people use is, *ipso facto*, the best language, though these teachers would deplore the use of the word "best," which even in this context smacks to them of elitism.

In *The American Scene*, his book about his pilgrimage to America in 1904, Henry James, visiting the Jewish quarter of New York, noted its extraordinary liveliness but also noted "where one's 'lettered' anguish came in—in the turn of one's eye from face to face for some betrayal of a prehensile hook for the linguistic tradition as one had known it." James ended this section of his account on a very Jamesian sentence: "The accent of the very ultimate future, in the States, may be destined to become the most beautiful on the globe and the very music of humanity (here the 'ethnic' synthesis shrouds itself thicker than ever); but whatever we shall know it for, certainly, we shall not know it for English—in any sense for which there is an existing literary measure."

HENRY JAMES's standard was of course stratospherically high, and it is worth remembering that the language crisis in the United States has always been with us. In 1892 the Report of the Committee on Composition and Rhetoric of the Harvard College Board of Overseers, for example, complained that: "It would not seem unreasonable to insist that young men of nineteen years of age who present themselves, for a college education, should be able not only to speak, but to write their mother tongue with ease and correctness." It is worth remembering, too, that Henry James had to be fired from his job as Paris correspondent for the old New York *Tribune* because his regular letter from Paris was considered simply too good for that newspaper's readers. (James replied that he understood, but would have the editor know that his compositions for the paper were quite "the poorest I could do, especially for the money!")

Still, without aspiring to Jamesian heights of literacy, it does seem clear that standards of literacy have slipped below the permissible. I am not referring here to gross illiteracies (such as that of the Chicago politician of a few years back who claimed he "didn't want to cast asparagus at my opponent"), which have always existed and are good fun, but to the language of the supposedly educated: that of teachers, broadcasters, journalists —people who make their living through the use of language. One can hardly pick up a newly published book today without finding it filled with typographical errors, ungrammatical patches, leaden language. Jargon has never seemed so to abound. Apart only from Senator Daniel P. Moynihan, no contemporary politician appears to take joy in language in the way that the late Senator Everett Dirksen or Adlai Stevenson did. Nor are days any palmier along the academic front. The word has recently gone out that college students do not write well, and young teachers, looking for work in a depressed job market, send in letters to English department chairmen putting themselves forward as keen to teach composition; only they usually call it "language skills and strategies" or "communication arts."

The point is that Henry James was wrong. Literacy today is not imperiled by the unwashed masses but by the well-scrubbed college-educated. Most of the interesting additions to English have

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over the years come from the lower classes, whose language usually derived from real experience, was expressed without abstractions, and, whatever its correctness, had the virtue of being vivid. Nor have these classes wished to foist their language on the general culture. Negro mothers and fathers with any ambitions for their children do not, so far as one can tell, want those children to learn Black English; they see it, quite properly, as a sure-fire way of keeping black children in their place. No uneducated person would use, in the fly-blown way that people who have been to college do, phrases like "identity crisis," "Protestant ethic," or "establishment." No uneducated person would use the word "ambivalent" (a word, Ralph Ellison notes in *Invisible Man*, "that doesn't explain it"), or "supportive," or "viable" (in the way that a Canadian psychologist said that "suicide can be a viable option"). Only the educated could be so ignorant.

As if this slip in standards were not enough, language itself has been under political attack in the United States for at least a decade now. Here feminists lead the way. Precision, elegance, good sense, all must fall before the feminist juggernaut, from the doing away with any words suffixed with "man" to the creation of new pronouns. But it is not feminists alone who must be catered to linguistically. The *sine qua non* of contemporary speech and writing is that it give no possible offense. Books—and especially textbooks—are combed carefully for possible linguistic burrs. Among the minority groups whose sensibilities must be guarded is the group known as the college-attending ignorant. Thus a friend of mine, in preparing a textbook in art history, was told to eliminate the term "anti-bourgeois"—on the ground that it was too difficult for his intended undergraduate audience. One might as well be asked to write a cookbook without mentioning the word salt.

In different ways these matters are discussed in two recent books on contemporary language: John Simon's *Paradigms Lost, Reflections on Literacy and Its Decline** and William Safire's *On Language*.† No one will have any difficulty discovering where John Simon stands on the issues, questions, and problems of language in our day. He believes that there are at present two cultures, divided not by the scientific or literary spirit as set out by Lord Snow, but by "whether a person has language or not." Simon writes:

> Language, I think, belongs to two groups only: gifted individuals everywhere, who use it imaginatively; and the fellowship of men and women, wherever they are, who, without being particularly inventive, nevertheless endeavor to speak and write correctly. Language, however, does not belong to the illiterate or to bodies of people forming tendentious and propagandistic interest groups, determined to use it for what they (usually mistakenly) believe to be their advantage.

Uncompromising, implacable, absolutely fearless, Simon's position might be termed elitist, except that so identifying him might give offense to others who consider themselves elitist on these matters. Perhaps it would be better to say that he is a little to the right of the Czar.

Simon is for good grammar, careful usage, the depoliticization of language. He is, in my view, on the side of the angels, yet, oddly for one so placed, he carries a pitchfork. He is hell on anyone who offends correctness in language. He is sedulous—not to say acidulous—in ferreting out error and crushing it. He is a man who could find a grammatical mistake in a Stop sign. Yet for a man so accustomed to discovering error wherever his eye alights, he seems never to cease being shocked, staggered, disbelieving, or alarmed when coming upon it afresh. This combination of looking for linguistic slovenliness and then being astonished when he finds it does not quite come off; it is rather like learning that the chief of New York's vice squad fainted when told there was prostitution in the city.

Too often Simon takes an almost unseemly pleasure in coming upon still more evidence of linguistic delinquency "in this benighted, permissive, and demotically oriented democracy of ours." The word "ignoramus" comes so readily to him. In his prose he is always ready to cross the street to knock down someone smaller than he: in the pages of this book, for example, Barbara Walters, Erica Jong, and Clive Barnes. Of one Professor Campbell Tatham, a radical professor of English at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee whose doctrine Simon detests, he writes: "Campbell Tatham may become the boor that [*sic*] made Milwaukee infamous." Simon has a weakness for puns, as witness his title, *Paradigms Lost* (why not Brother Can you Paradigm?), but as great a weakness for a free-floating nastiness. He resembles nothing so much as an exterminator hired to eliminate pests who blows up the entire building.

Yet Simon is often quite impressive in his search-and-destroy missions. Like a truffle dog, his critical nose need only be inserted into a text to find a great richness of error. Many of those he finds are obvious, for bad grammar and poor usage, unlike truffles, are plentiful. But many are subtle, such as his distinction between the words "annoy" and "aggravate." Sometimes he simply goes too far, laying the knout to a writer for placing a period outside quotation marks, or advising his hearers not to read any letter "that follows up the addressee's invocation with a semicolon: nothing intelligent can be contained therein."

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* Clarkson N. Potter, 222 pp., $12.95.

† New York Times Books, 331 pp., $12.95.

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If it isn't clear, an old saying has it, it isn't French. After reading *Paradigms Lost*, I am tempted to add: if it doesn't contain errors, it isn't English. One of the reasons John Simon is able to find as many lapses as he does is that English, even though it has no complicated system of declension, is a rule-ridden language, with plenty of leeway for disagreement about usage and questions of taste. Not even Simon's pages are free of error. He himself owns up to a mistake; it seems he once used "among" where "amid" would have been more proper. Here are a few other egg stains on his linguistic vest that he might ponder. He uses the vulgar inversion of *Time* magazine style ("Claims Duneton") and the solecism "guideline," a bureaucratic neologism deriving from the nautical term "guyline." He calls Edmund Wilson and Vladimir Nabokov "polymaths," which, strictly speaking (the way Simon encourages the rest of us to speak), they are not; polyglots, yes; polymaths, no. Clichés crop up, such as "fall between the stools," and "stick out like a sore thumb." Puff and baggy-pants words make their way onto the page, among them the odiously inflated "dialogue" and the vapid "humanistic value." If Simon can criticize another writer for a period outside a quotation mark, perhaps it would not be out of place to suggest that the word "antimale" without a hyphen in his book looks rather like the dish served in a Mexican home before the tamales.

I raise these points not because I think they are crucial but partly for the sheer joy of catching Simon out in error, the vigilante unvigilant; and partly because, while small errors will no doubt one day lead to large, for the moment there are enough large errors about to let pass a period outside quotation marks. Mr. Simon believes one of the chief objects of the careful deployment of language is the achievement of elegance. I think that is indeed one of its objects, but today there is a greater one: the avoidance of deception in its various forms, deliberate, unconscious, and self-. With such words as meaningful, relevant, fulfilling, dialogue, humanistic, structure, and viable at our disposal, not to speak of the wondrous cant from politics and psychology and education, we have all the means at hand to be lied to or to lie convincingly to ourselves. Here in my opinion are the targets toward which guns such as John Simon's ought to be aimed.

Where Simon is aiming is indeed sometimes a bit of a puzzle. Much of the content of *Paradigms Lost* originally appeared in *Esquire*, a journal better known for its interest in sartorial than in linguistical elegance. The question of audience may well have puzzled Simon himself, for throughout these essays he seems to be under the double obligation of discovering error while explaining what is correct. Thus when he thwacks Vincent Canby over the knuckles for consistently using disinterested to mean lack of interest, he also finds himself under the obligation to inform his readers that " 'disinterested' means unbiased, impartial." If he quotes a line or phrase in French, a translation in parentheses must follow. Simon's problem is that he cannot with certainty pay his readers the courtesy of postulating some intelligence in them about these matters. The result is that he assumes a shared superiority with his readers even as he condescends to them.

John Simon, I fear, gives standards a bad name. Standards are of course essential, but it is better for a writer to observe them in his own work than to have him ceaselessly preach their necessity—to let example become precept. Simon not only preaches but preens. He preens himself, for example, on his sesquipedality, yet when he uses an unfamiliar word it is not generally interestingly deployed, and so one usually finds oneself incurious about its meaning. The temptation is to want to put some space between Simon and oneself; he is the sort of writer who, when one finds oneself agreeing with him, makes one instantly want to reconsider one's own position. Yet he is quite right in his demand for standards, and in his opinion that without them we are lost.

WILLIAM SAFIRE operates under a very different set of assumptions from John Simon's. Rather than a guardian or vigilante, he is a word watcher. He is chiefly interested in the progress—or, depending upon one's point of view, regress—of the language. As a political journalist, he is in a splendid position to receive freshly minted jargon and vogue words; and thus reading him one can learn a good deal about linguistic change. Safire writes without Simon's magisterial tone. In his column a spirit of bonhomie prevails, and he conducts the various points of debate and controversy about words with, as one of his readers says, "a sense of sport."

Safire's tendency in linguistic controversy is to be a peacemaker, though in such controversy the peacemakers shall be cursed. He tells us that many of the letters he receives about his column—a large number of which are printed in *On Language*—begin, "Shame on you." In battles over usage, Safire often offers to hold the coats of both parties. Sometimes he will, figuratively, invite everyone out for a drink. Thus on the question of whether the word memorandum in its plural form ought to be memorandums or memoranda, he suggests sidestepping the issue and using memos. On the question of whether the word presently ought to be used synonymously with the word currently or to retain its traditional meaning of soon or directly, he advises that presently "is a word best forgotten, at least for the time being." On simple error, he does take a stand, usually a genial one: "I don't want to get prescriptive or anything, but people who use *bi* for 'twice' should cut it out." Yet he is a man who accepts the less than

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grammatical "hopefully," "not because I accept loose new standards, but because I embrace time-tested and readily understood usage."

Mr. Safire calls himself "a libertarian language activist," which he describes as follows:

> A libertarian language activist is not one of those relax-and-enjoy-it purely descriptive types. He wants to cheer on "parameter," borrowed from mathematics and now used to mean scope, or limits; at the same time, he wants to hoot at such nonce expressions as "What am I looking at?" now used to mean "What are the consequences?" or "How deeply am I likely to become involved?" Similarly, he will welcome "full-court press" from basketball lingo to replace the tiring "all-out effort," but will ridicule the vogue verb "defense against" from football, preferring the more direct "defend." It's a matter of taste.

"It's a matter of taste" is a sentiment John Simon would never brook. He would likely respond, "Yes, it is—good taste or bad." Apart from his manner, I happen to side with Simon, who quotes Dr. Johnson to the useful effect that in these matters "we retard what we cannot repel, that we palliate what we cannot cure." Simon is very good in attacking the cliché about language being a living, perpetually changing thing. Of course language changes; the question is what direction change takes. "When change does not obfuscate," Safire says, "don't fight it." The difficulty is that nowadays change does so often tend in the direction of obfuscation. As Safire remarks toward the close of his book: "A sound lexicographic case can be made for the theory that our traditional sources of vogue lingo—the argot of musicians, the cant of the underworld, and the inventive richness of black English—are being replaced by the political and communications worlds, acting not merely as disseminators but originators as well."

"Jockey," announces the well-known underwear manufacturer, during a commercial break on the evening news. "More than a name. A commitment." Then President Carter appears on the television screen to announce: "We remain steadfast in our commitment to human rights." So much for commitment.

WHAT is to be done? The problem, in my view, is one of authority. In questions about language, who is to say who is right and who is wrong? To decide, Simon calls for "the eventual creation of an Academy of the Anglo-American Language," even though to do so, he concedes, "would be nearly impossible. But necessary." In a culture so intensely politicized as ours now is, creating such an Academy figures to be much more impossible than necessary. To cite but a single example, could such an Academy be formed without Noam Chomsky, the great name in linguistics in our day? Probably not. Yet I for one should not be pleased to see so politically engaged a man as Chomsky adjudicating questions of language; imagine him, for example, on the word "imperialism." It may well be that one of the reasons the traditional meaning of disinterestedness is fast fading is that the quality of disinterest, the thing itself, has all but disappeared from contemporary life.

Simon also proposes what during the Eisenhower administration was called a "person-to-person" approach. He suggests that when we come across error we correct it—stomp it out, crunch, on the spot:

> Whenever, wherever we hear someone say "between you and I" or one of the related horrors, and whoever the offender may be, we go into action. To strangers in the street, we may have to be polite; to superiors (in position, evidently, not in knowledge), we may even have to be somewhat humble. But correct them we must. To all others we may be as sharp, forceful, tonitruous as the circumstances permit or demand: let family, friends, and neighbors hear us correct them loudly and clearly—let *between you and me* resound across the land. Otherwise there will soon be no more communication between you and me.

There are people—I am among them—who would find this temperamentally impossible. Meanwhile, as a matter of personal safety, I think it probably not a good idea to invite John Simon to accompany you to a meeting of your Teamsters Local.

Simon proposes other, even Lacedaemonian measures, one of which is to turn the children of the unlettered over to day-care centers where they will daily hear Standard English spoken. Where to find the people to work in these centers is but the first of the technical difficulties such a scheme would entail. In its very outlandishness, though, the proposal illustrates how dim are the prospects for language reform.

Perhaps the place to begin reform is by making certain useful distinctions. Some language questions can only be decided on the basis of taste. For example, I prefer to use the word presently in its traditional meaning of soon or directly. I prefer it chiefly because it is traditional, and the argument from tradition is appealing to me: I like to use words with the same sense that cultivated writers and speakers have used them before me. Is this snobbery? Possibly it is, though defensible snobbery, of the kind used in defense of not eating peas with a knife. By the same token, the word hopefully, used as an adverb without a connecting verb, seems to me worth condemning. William Safire defends it by analogy (in *On Language*); we use the adverbs finally and basically without connecting verbs, so why not hopefully? My argument is that in a secular age, hopefully has come to

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stand in for the old phrase "God willing," as in "God willing, we shall not have another war in our lifetime," and faulty grammar seems to me a poor substitute for religious feeling. But the proper uses of presently and hopefully are finally matters of nice discrimination. In neither instance is clarity at stake. What is at stake is the possibility of offending that touchy minority group, the truly well-educated.

There are, however, all too many instances where clarity, even reality, is at stake. When a freshman university student writes, as one of my students recently did, "The novel *Billy Budd* is a relatively short story," this seems to me merely ignorance, easily enough corrected by explaining the difference between a novel and a short story. But when the same student writes, "The basic difference between Billy Budd and Claggart is one of lifestyle," it is a cause of vague language obscuring perception itself, and this seems to me sad, even a bit crazy.

Not that the appetite for abstraction, the preference for the vague over the particular, is an altogether new phenomenon in the United States. In his chapter "How American Democracy Has Modified the English Language," Tocqueville noted:

> . . . I wonder if vagueness may not have a secret charm for talkers and writers too in these lands. . . . Democratic citizens, then, will often have vacillating thoughts, and so language must be loose enough to leave them play. As they never know whether what they say today will fit the facts of tomorrow, they have a natural taste for abstract terms. An abstract word is like a box with a false bottom; you may put in it what ideas you please and take them out again unobserved.

Yet this taste for the abstract has intensified in the United States in recent years, and the removal, often for political reasons, of any authority for using language correctly and with discrimination has only exacerbated the general condition. The condition of language today is such that communication threatens to be clogged, perception clouded, the possibility for serious discourse lessened. No writer of quiet yet unassailable authority —an H.W. Fowler, a Sir Ernest Gowers—is likely to arise in current circumstances to tear down the Tower of Babel now abuilding. Neither the scolding voice of John Simon nor the breezy one of William Safire is about to turn the trick. The duty of everyone who considers himself educated is to keep language alive by using it with respect and precision. But resistance among people who care about language—and, to judge from the ample correspondence Simon and Safire say they receive, there is reason to believe many people do care—will have to be individual. Although the prospects are not very bright, united, those who do care may one day lift poor Emma Bovary out of the concrete.

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Deformations of the Holocaust

Robert Alter

Over the last year and a half, there has been a growing debate on what stance Jews should assume collectively toward the Holocaust, what role it should play in their institutional life, in their theology, and in their political thinking. The debate has been conducted in the pages of Jewish journals like the *Reconstructionist, Sh'ma, Midstream,* and the *National Jewish Monthly,* and has been given space in general magazines like the *National Review, Newsweek* (which sketched out the controversy in its religion section on March 10, 1980), and the New York *Times Magazine* (which in its September 14, 1980 issue ran a more detailed overview of the debate by Paula E. Hyman, with extensive quotations from a few of the disputants). As might be expected, different groups have seized on the Holocaust out of different motives, and various critics have objected to the entire trend for different reasons. I shall try to sort out the principal elements of this large and somewhat confusing picture, but first something needs to be said about the evolution of the Holocaust phenomenon in this country since the early 1970's and about its publicly visible dimensions.

The two central events that would appear to have triggered the new consciousness of the Holocaust were the Six-Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973. I say "triggered" rather than "produced" because this turning of so many Jewish minds to the terrible vistas of genocide may have been inevitable sooner or later both as a response to the extremity of the original trauma and as an expression of the ambiguities and malaise of Jewish identity in our late, troubled stage of modernity. In any case, what many American Jews experienced in those anxious weeks before June 6, 1967—a time worth recalling now as our government provides hostile Arab states with offensive weapons—was the imminent possibility that three million Jews might be annihilated. Fortunately, that prospect of catastrophe proved to be founded on an inadequate assessment of the capability of the Israel Defense Force vis-à-vis the surrounding Arab armies. In the Arab surprise attack of 1973, however, it seemed, at least during the first days of the war, that the destruction of the state of Israel and a large part of its inhabitants might be within the reach of Egyptian tanks and Syrian rockets; and ever since, the thinking of Jews about their own historical condition has located it with increasing frequency between the threat of total destruction in the past and the danger of total destruction in the future.

This heightened emphasis on the Holocaust has been evident both in new institutions, to which substantial financial resources have been devoted, and in the more transient artifacts of popular culture. The late 70's saw the publication of a spate of novels on the Holocaust, a subject that had been touched on only exceptionally and obliquely during the vogue of American Jewish writing a decade earlier. (An instructive index of changing times in this regard is provided by the Fall 1980 issue of the quarterly *Judaism,* which offers a group of three articles on the Holocaust in American fiction. Two of these pieces attempt to show that not only Malamud's *The Fixer* but also his earlier novel *The Assistant* and Arthur Miller's *Focus* are somehow really "about" the Holocaust, as though reference to genocide were now the touchstone of authenticity for all postwar fiction written by Jews.) The televised dramatization of Gerald Green's *Holocaust* in the spring of 1978, on four consecutive evenings of prime time, has proved to be only the first in a parade of such programs. This fall, Arthur Miller's concentration-camp drama, *Playing for Time,* was shown, with the vocal PLO supporter Vanessa Redgrave as a Jewish victim; a new television production of *The Diary of Anne Frank* has been aired; a dramatization of *The Wall,* John Hersey's novel of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, is also in preparation; and the network offices are no doubt buzzing with ideas for other barbed-wire extravaganzas.

Meanwhile, between the televising of Gerald Green and of Arthur Miller, the President's Commission on the Holocaust was established in the fall of 1978. The Commission, chaired by Elie Wiesel, made a tour of the death camps and of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem the following summer, and concluded its task with a series of recommendations

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to the President for the national memorializing of the Holocaust and the implementing of the lessons of conscience it should teach. It is not impugning the high seriousness of the Commission's distinguished members to suggest that this, too, was in one respect a media event, and was perhaps chiefly conceived precisely as that by those in Washington who made it possible.

Outside the busy arena of the media, research, teaching, and publication on the Holocaust have been increasing apace, and the funding to support these activities is apparently generous. There are now half a dozen or more Holocaust research centers in this country, including Zachor, the National Holocaust Resource Center in New York, and the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies in Los Angeles (I shall return to these later). There are at least three regular publications devoted to Holocaust concerns, one academic, one political, and one focused on public relations. A recent survey shows 93 courses on the Holocaust currently offered at American and Canadian colleges and universities; in nearly half these institutions, the course in question is the *only* one of any sort given on Jewish history or culture. Temple University has a full-fledged graduate program in Holocaust studies within the field of religion. I do not have an exact count of professorships in Holocaust studies, but private donors to American universities have shown an alacrity for endowing chairs in this subject before all other areas of Judaica.

Since one may readily sense a querulous note in my report of these developments, let me hasten to say that I do not for a moment question the importance of a deepened and more detailed historical understanding of the Nazi effort to destroy the Jewish people. The Holocaust, as the proponents of these various new research programs have argued, has been the central ghastly event of our century and an awesome watershed of Jewish historical experience. Given its abysmal significance, not only are we obliged never to forget what happened, but we have a moral imperative to try to understand to the best of our limited capacity the causes of this unprecedented enormity, its mechanics, its consequences, and perhaps even (if that is really possible) its concrete reality for the victims. We surely need the work of serious historians like Lucy S. Dawidowicz, Yehuda Bauer, and Raul Hilberg; and, as in other areas of culture, intrinsically important activity may derive a certain unexpected advantage from the groundswell of a vogue: an exemplary piece of historical inquiry like Lucy S. Dawidowicz's *The War Against the Jews* (1975) might not have gotten the audience and the critical attention it did had it been published earlier.

THE new wave of interest in the Holocaust, then, might be described as the epidemic excess of a necessity, and some of what is being done at least in part through its impetus may help achieve the sort of painful knowledge of the past with which we cannot dispense. Nevertheless, I would suggest that serious distortions of the Holocaust itself and, what is worse, of Jewish life occur when the Holocaust is commercialized, politicized, theologized, or academicized—all of which processes seem to be occurring today in varying degree and manner. Since we have just touched on the burgeoning of Holocaust studies on American campuses, let me comment first on the problems involved in the assimilation of this subject by the academy. From that issue, I shall go on to the crucial, potentially explosive question of the political ramifications of focusing on the Holocaust, with a brief sidelong glance at theology and commercialism.

To begin with, it should be noted that a topic or event, however momentous, is not an academic discipline, and that perspectives are skewed when, for budgetary or political reasons, a topic is made into a discipline. We do not have, and certainly should not have, academic majors in World War II or in slavery, and the same should be true for the Holocaust, which needs to be studied in the larger disciplinary perspective of modern European history and Jewish history. The establishing of Holocaust studies as a discipline or at least as a central sub-discipline also has grave consequences in the allocation of scarce academic resources. Although some of the specialists in the field have proclaimed their conviction that it is as important to study how the Jews lived as how they died, that is not the direction in which a good deal of new funding is channeled. One should recall those forty or so institutions of higher learning where a student may be instructed in the various phases of the Final Solution but has nowhere to turn in the curriculum to find out what the Haskalah was, how a page of Talmud reads, or who Judah Hanasi might have been.

In the past twelve months, American university presses—another sector of the academy seriously hampered by budgetary restrictions—have published three books on the literature of the Holocaust, Edward Alexander's *The Resonance of Dust*,* Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi's *By Words Alone*,† and Alvin H. Rosenfeld's *A Double Dying***; and I am aware of at least three more book-length studies of this general topic now in progress. Each of these three recently published volumes has its distinctive virtues (as well as certain drawbacks I will mention momentarily), but the nagging question of distribution of human and financial resources persists. For in this same period—and indeed, a good deal longer than that—no book in English has been published on modern Yiddish or Hebrew literature. One wonders if the larger social

* Ohio State University Press, 256 pp., $15.00.
† University of Chicago Press, 262 pp., $15.00.
** Indiana University Press, 210 pp., $17.50.

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and cultural purposes of scholarship are better served by pondering the literary refractions of mass murder or by undertaking, say, a critical biography of Sholem Aleichem.

Still another underlying problem with the academicization of the Holocaust is the unhappy effect of naturalizing the horror by making it part of the curriculum. Lionel Trilling described a closely related process when he observed in *Beyond Culture* how the university study of radically disturbing modern writers like Dostoevsky, Conrad, and Kafka had domesticated the rage and terror they expressed, converting those anguished attitudes into the bland pieties of a new intelligentsia. Yehuda Bauer, the Israeli historian of the Holocaust, has made much the same point in a trenchant comment on his own teaching experience: "I can testify myself to the ease with which you can describe murder and then turn it into a seminar paper." Of the three recently published studies of Holocaust literature, the one that comes closest to this pitfall is Sidra Ezrahi's *By Words Alone*. Hers is the most patiently researched and comprehensive of the three books (the other two are really collections of critical essays), and though she does make intelligent discriminations, even distinguishing good from not so good in this multifaceted literature of catastrophe, there is something a little chilling about the taxonomic impulse (of course, much academic work is necessarily taxonomic) that subdivides the various reactions to genocide into documentation-as-art, "concentrationary realism," survival literature, mythologizing literature, and so forth.

The effect of this classifying procedure is to distance the actual events while at the same time assembling from them a nightmarish gallery of horrific images. It is perhaps an unavoidable consequence of offering a critical representation of a long series of representations of an ultimate obscenity, and the Alexander and Rosenfeld books are not entirely free of this sense of anthologizing horrors while trying to understand a "new order of human consciousness" (Rosenfeld) or "the historical situation of the Jewish people" (Alexander). Rosenfeld and Alexander, the former attuned to the fine modulations of poetic expression, the latter interested in the political implications of his subject, convey the horrors embodied in the texts they discuss with a certain eloquence lacking in Mrs. Ezrahi's more academic prose, but perhaps eloquence itself may also be an inadvertent betrayal of the dead, literary criticism's peculiar version of that academic domestication of murder which Yehuda Bauer evokes.

The academic aspect of Edward Alexander's study is perhaps most evident in the amount of space he devotes to summarizing exposition of the fiction and poetry and diaries he considers, something about which he himself expresses uneasiness in his preface but which he feels is necessary because of the relative unfamiliarity of many of the works to American readers. The ultimate aim of Alexander's project, however, is decidedly unacademic, for it openly uses these literary responses to genocide in order to conduct a passionately engaged argument about the present condition—he calls it a "desperate" one—of the Jewish people. Though he devotes a chapter to theological construals of the Holocaust, the "lesson" of the European catastrophe as he sees it is fundamentally political and starkly unambiguous: the world wants to destroy the Jews, and the only reasonable response is the most alertly militant Zionism. There are elements of this position that seem to me misconceived, though it is actually closer to a sane inference from the awful facts of the Holocaust than the other main positions that have been assumed.

RECENT attempts to appropriate the Holocaust form a broad spectrum. There is a militantly particularist Right, with which I would associate Alexander; it includes such organizations as the Americans for a Safe Israel (an American support group for the Likud in Israel) in which he is active, and the Jewish Defense League. The antithetical counterpart is a radical universalist Left, focused in a quarterly publication called *The Generation After*. In the middle of the spectrum, with manifestly greater numbers and greater financial resources, is the group around Irving Greenberg's Holocaust Resource Center, which publishes the magazine *Shoah* (the name is the Hebrew term for the Holocaust). The emphases of this centrist group are more frequently theological and academic than political, but its members characteristically try to strike a balance between universalism and particularism, defending Jewish claims of persecution while pleading for a "politics of conscience" that will protest genocide or the denial of human rights wherever they occur. Several members of the *Shoah* circle were recruited for the President's Commission on the Holcoaust and its supporting staff and advisory board.

The relations among these three groups can most readily be seen in how each conceives the kind of historical occurrence represented by the Holocaust. For the *Shoah* circle—which includes Alvin Rosenfeld and Elie Wiesel as well as Irving Greenberg and the theologian Emil Fackenheim —it is a unique Event (the capital letter is a frequent usage) in historical time, like Sinai; and no less than the great desert theophany, it confronts us with mysteries to brood over. *The Generation After*, which like *Shoah* prints its title over a photographic background of barbed wire, is so far from conceiving the Holocaust as a unique Event that it insists the Holocaust in fact has happened many times, and is probably about to happen again.

The contributors to *The Generation After*, whose allegiances are with the "progressive Jewish

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movement" among college students, with radical feminism, the anti-nuclear movement, and the Third World, are apprehensive of a new fascism in America that will try to destroy the Jews and others, but they give a peculiar weight in their outlook to the others. Holocausts thus are seen to have overtaken the Gypsies, homosexuals, American Indians, and a variety of other groups that have stood in the way of the "socioeconomic interests" of capitalism. (One writer actually equates the Gatling gun, which he supposes to have been devised for the purpose of massacring the Indians, with the Nazis' Zyklon B gas.) Wiesel, the President's Commission, and the *Shoah* group are roundly castigated for their establishment politics. Although one vehement critic of the entire Holocaust vogue, Arnold Jacob Wolf, has objected to it because he fears it will turn Jews into chauvinists and reactionaries, *The Generation After* vividly demonstrates that Jews will let the Holocaust make of them whatever they like. This journal, as it announces under its title, is "committed to the lessons of the Holocaust," and, in a world imagined as a continuing proliferation of holocausts, the chief of those lessons is an unswerving universalism, involving a firm stand against all genocides, "including," as one contributor confidently puts it, "those perpetrated by the U.S."

THE group around *The Generation After* is small and in itself politically insignificant, but its predisposition to universalize the Holocaust is shared by large numbers today—and, indeed, such universalization may well be the precondition for the new marketability of the Holocaust in the mass media. I suspect that William Styron's arresting if flawed novel, *Sophie's Choice* (1979), would not have enjoyed the popular success it did if it had not placed such stress on the idea that the Holocaust was not exclusively or perhaps even primarily a Jewish affair.

The most egregious and also ominous instance of the universalizing tendency in recent months was provided by the ineffable Vanessa Redgrave. In assuming the role of a Jewish inmate at Auschwitz, given her notorious public association with both the PLO and the Libyan center for international terrorism, she was of course implicitly conveying the idea that the Palestinians were the new Jews, that she could play a Jewish victim precisely because she was identified with the Palestinians.

But the paths of universalization have still more tortuous turns. The CBS production of *Playing for Time* recruited extras to take the parts of Auschwitz prisoners from women living in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, area who had gone through the Three Mile Island nuclear scare. It is not clear whether Miss Redgrave was the originator of this brilliant idea, but she publicly defended it in terms that the contributors to *The Generation After* would readily understand: "These women knew they had been treated exactly as fascism had treated the people they were playing." Such pernicious nonsense is hardly surprising from a member of the Workers Revolutionary party, but it is disquieting to see it endorsed in the mass media, as Jack Kroll did (*Newsweek*, September 29, 1980), justifying this promiscuous extension of the concept of Holocaust in the following language: "Perhaps we who smugly know that bumbling bureaucrats and lying politicians in a flawed democracy are not 'exactly' like fascist monsters have reached the point where our admirable liberal or conservative nose for such nuances [*sic*] inhibits our social energy." Heaven help us from the "social energy" that would be released by this sort of appropriation of the model of Nazism to explain democratic realities.

In contrast to the proliferation of holocausts imagined by the Left and its sentimental fellow-travelers, for the Right there is only one Holocaust, but it is not a unique Event to be pondered, as it is for the theological-historical Center, because it has not really stopped happening. The Jewish Defense League's slogan, "Never again!" is essentially an ellipsis for something like: never again will we allow the process of murder working against us on all sides to achieve the success it did in the Nazi years. Edward Alexander's formulation is instructive: "The Holocaust . . . let loose against the Jews a primordial energy of destructiveness that has by no means spent itself. The more I read of the novels, poems, memoirs, and diaries discussed in the essays that comprise this book, the more I felt I was reading not of a past finished and dead but of one continuous (though not, of course, identical) with the total form of our present life."

Threatened by a still pulsating energy of destructiveness, the Jews on the Right have no dependable allies. The Jews on the Left, surrounded by socioeconomic interests promising ever new holocausts, are naturally allied with Gentile progressives (a new managing editor of *The Generation After* is identified as "a Ukrainian-Polish-Italian non-Jew"). The Jews in the Center, contemplating the awesome revelation of Auschwitz, are joined not by non-Jews but by Christians, some of whom, in the pages of *Shoah* and elsewhere, grapple with the far-reaching consequences of the Holocaust for Christian theology.

LET me suggest that any effort to make the Holocaust the ultimate touchstone of Jewish values, whether political or religious, is bound to lead to distortions of emphasis and priority, or worse, because of the staggering enormity of the event itself, which surely has connections with earlier disasters and subsequent dangers faced by Jews, but which is also different in kind from them. The shrilly ideological distortions of the Left need no further comment; the complicated and variegated potential for distortion of the Center is a topic to which I shall re-

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turn by way of conclusion; the distortion engendered on the Right needs to be distinguished carefully from that part of its position which is a necessary political inference from the facts of the Holocaust.

After the terrifyingly easy slaughter of millions of defenseless European Jews, it is painfully clear that a prerequisite for Jewish existence is a physical homeland where the means and initiative of defense will be in the hands of the Jews as a sovereign people. The degree of power a small nation can exert is obviously limited in a world governed by vast global forces and subject to oil blackmail. Nevertheless, Jews cannot now contemplate divesting themselves of whatever modicum of power they can manage to wield. One hardly needs to be associated with the Zionist Right to reach this conclusion. The Israeli novelist, Amos Oz, a vocal figure on the Left in Israel and a vehement opponent of many Begin policies, puts this political consequence of the Holocaust in the following sharp terms: There once was, he tells his American lecture audiences, a Jewish "shadow state" that in many essential respects far surpassed the present state of Israel. This shadow state, which extended over a large part of Central and Eastern Europe, had several million citizens; its own rich language, Yiddish; a flourishing theater, press, and educational system; elaborate institutions of self-governance and social welfare. All that it lacked, Oz concludes, was a couple of thousand tanks and perhaps an atomic bomb or two; and because of that, it was utterly destroyed.

The difference between this position and Edward Alexander's is the difference between recognizing after the Holocaust that we live in a dangerous world and must act accordingly, and imagining that Jews everywhere (and especially, of course, in Israel) are confronted with "a primordial energy of destructiveness," which amounts to a mythologized version of the pragmatic political perception. To be sure, Alexander notes that the forces threatening Jewish survival today are continuous rather than identical with Nazism, but the effect of such Holocaust-centered thinking is to introduce at least a faint undertone of panic into political discussion by superimposing the images of past murderers on present adversaries. Any Israeli government can make concessions to the various Arab states or to the Palestinians only with the greatest wariness, acutely conscious of the practical dangers each concession might entail. But to invoke the Holocaust as the supreme paradigm of the historical experience of the Jewish people is to preclude the idea of political bargaining and concessions, for every potential advantage granted to one's opponent, whatever might be given in exchange, will be seen as a paving stone on the road to extinction.

The Holocaust is really no guide to the Zionist political enterprise for the simple reason that even without the background of genocide, the dangers confronting Israel would be just as imminent and the means required to deal with those dangers just as evident. The project of establishing Jewish sovereignty in Palestine was begun decades before the Final Solution, and if we can imagine for a moment a Jewish state without the occurrence of the Holocaust, its struggle for survival would not have been very different. Even if such a state were a fifth the size of Israel today, by the harsh logic of conflicting nationalisms, it would still be faced with implacable Arab resistance, reviled as an alien wedge in the Arab heartland, and threatened with terrorism and invasion to which it could only respond with constant armed vigilance. As things are, consciousness of the Holocaust is hardly what motivates the Israeli soldier to fight, and it is difficult to see how it provides any really useful point of orientation for Zionist policy or even, I would contend, for Zionist ideology.

There are, however, two related aspects of the threat to Israel that have been aggravated by the accomplished fact of the Nazi mass murders; and even if they do not fundamentally alter the intrinsic political predicament of a Jewish state in the Middle East, it is well to keep them soberly in mind. First, the general awareness that Jewish millions have within recent memory been so easily slaughtered makes the very idea of wiping out the Jewish people more imaginable—and for some, I suspect, perhaps actually more acceptable. (One may even be permitted to wonder whether all those televised images of gaunt, helpless Jews on their way to the ovens touch viewers with sympathy or rather stir on the shadow-side of their minds inchoate desires to see the job finished that the Germans began.) If the annihilation of the Jews has become a prospect that can be somehow contemplated, what often accompanies such contemplation, as a psychological defense mechanism against the guilt it might arouse, is a violent twisting around of the historical terms of genocide: the Israelis are cast as Nazis, the Arabs as their innocent "Jewish" victims. This brutal distortion, of course, has been abundantly exploited by Arab propaganda and has been virtually endorsed by the United Nations. It has made Israel's international stance more precarious, and it is enough to put any Jew on the defensive, though such use of the vocabulary of genocide by Israel's determined enemies should not lead to a mirror-reversal in which a perfect "continuity," as Edward Alexander would have it, is seen between Nazi pathology and Arab hostility.

IN ANY CASE, the dominant Center of the spectrum of American responses to the Holocaust, as I have already noted, has been less concerned with politics than with theology, and the problematic nature of the link between religion and the memory of genocide deserves comment. The most influential thinker in religious and academic circles preoccupied with the Holo-

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caust has been Emil Fackenheim. His intellectual enterprise over the past decade has been directed toward creating a theology of Jewish survival after Nazism that would embrace all self-affirming Jews, including those who profess no belief in God. What he claims all such Jews hear is a "commanding voice" from Auschwitz that tells them they must persist as Jews, lest they grant Hitler a posthumous victory.

This notion has been variously criticized for its conceptual fuzziness and for the way it displaces a God of life commanding life with a horrendous focus of death commanding life in a sense, but without a revealed Torah to define life's meaning and purpose. One thing that must be said in Fackenheim's defense on this point is that his survivalist theology does succeed in articulating a vague but powerful impulse felt in various ways by a large part of the Jewish people since 1945. In the face of all those terrible murders, many Jews, whatever their ideological commitments, have been moved by a strong resolution to continue as Jews, and Fackenheim as a thinker is deeply in touch with this feeling.

What I would object to, however, about Fackenheim's position is the way it coopts Jewish secularity, transforming every contemporary decision to go on as a Jew into an ultimately theological vocation. It seems to me a suspect transformation, but it is characteristic of the large Center group, for whom in the final analysis both theological reflection on the Holocaust and academic inquiry into it are ways of working out issues of Jewish identity, so that the religious blurs into the secular, the existential into the scholarly. On this murky issue of genocide and Jewish identity, Jacob Neusner has shrewdly observed (*National Review*, August 3, 1979) that the television series *Holocaust* was the Jewish equivalent of the televised *Roots* for American blacks—a way of feeling ethnic distinctiveness, of rescuing out of a "heritage" of unspeakable suffering a kind of perverse collective pride. In a more recent article (*Reconstructionist*, April 1980), Neusner aptly generalizes on this whole process: "What we have done is to make the murder of the Jews of Europe into one of the principal components of the civil religion of American Jews."

It should be self-evident why this new ethnic fellowship in victimhood is unacceptable. For three millennia the Jews have been a people holding a belief in a grand though dangerous historical destiny dictated by its covenant with God. It is true that this people intermittently underwent defeat as a national entity and murderous persecution as a minority, but suffering was never really made the rationale for its existence. Even when martyrology has been introduced into the liturgy—as in the verse-narrative of the ten sages killed in the 2nd-century rebellion against Rome, which is part of the Musaf prayer for Yom Kippur—there is a final emphasis on a transcendent if inscrutable purpose served by such deaths. The recent European dead, however, were for the most part victims, not martyrs, trapped in a vast technology of mass murder, with no sense of purpose, very often with no sense of being Jews altogether. (To be sure, a small minority of the victims of the Nazis must have had a consciousness of themselves as religious martyrs, just as there must have been mere victims among the martyred Jews of earlier periods, but there is a drastic difference in proportion between the two orders of historical experience.)

When, as frequently occurs these days, the traditional Yom Kippur martyrology is replaced with memoirs of the death camps and ghettos, the quest for relevance in effect leads to ensconcing in public worship evocations of sheer horror. I do not want to suggest that the memorialization of the recent European catastrophe has no place in Jewish liturgy, but the institutional centering of a victimization so unprecedented as to resist meaning may be more than anything else an appeal to Jewish masochism, an attempt to base collective identity on a sense of dread or—if we are utterly honest about these matters—on the special *frisson* of vicariously experiencing the unspeakable, in all the material comfort and security of our American lives.

Irving Greenberg, according to *Newsweek*, envisages a Jewish religious future in which we will eat the rotten bread of Auschwitz or the potato peelings of Bergen-Belsen, as now we eat bitter herbs on Passover, in a ritual reenactment of past suffering. One respects the seriousness of Greenberg's intentions, but the prospect he conjures up is a perversion of historical Judaism. On Passover we eat both bitter herbs and *matzah*, "the bread of affliction," as highly stylized invocations of a suffering which is no more than the first moment in a joyous process of national liberation, the Exodus from Egyptian slavery. The nature of the Holocaust does not allow any such assumption of the hideous affliction into hope or triumph. Only by violent wrenching can the destruction of European Jewry be "justified" as the first stage in the birth of the state of Israel. The only real exodus from the camps was in smoke.

THE taste of Bergen-Belsen as a rite of Jewish identity amidst American affluence is pursued in a different style by the Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies, the West Coast counterpart to Greenberg's Holocaust Resource Center. The Wiesenthal Center is a quintessentially Los Angeles version of this new "civil religion" of American Jewry, and it will be a useful concluding example because it illustrates how a peculiarly American mode of boosterism and organizational know-how can be incongruously yoked with the memorialization of mass murder. The cover of *Response*, the publication of the Wiesenthal Center, is mercifully free of barbed-wire designs. The left-hand top margin of

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its first page is carefully imprinted in Hebrew boldface with the abbreviation for the Aramaic rubric, *bisayata dishemaya*, "with the help of God." The Center staff seems largely run by clean-shaven Orthodox rabbis in three-piece suits, surrounded here in the photographs by sleek-looking donors, sympathetic Senators, and movie stars. Those columns of *Response* not dealing with fund-raising activities are commendably devoted to current questions like Nazi war criminals still enjoying the benefits of American citizenship, pressures against CBS's showing of *Playing for Time* with Vanessa Redgrave, and the threat to the survival of the Falashas in Ethiopia. The real vision, however, of the Wiesenthal Center is embodied in a multimedia project for which funds are still being solicited. The technical dimensions of the project must be read to be believed:

> This multi-screen, multi-channel sound, audio-visual experience of the Holocaust will utilize a 40 foot wide and 23 foot high screen in the configuration of an arch, three 16mm. film projectors and a unique Cinemascope lens, eighteen 35 mm. slide projectors and pentaphonic sound (five source), all linked to a central computer which will control all functions simultaneously. It will be a definitive educational medium on the subject.

Definitive, one might say, except for the omission of a computerized, convector-current olfactory unit to waft about in seven presequenced patterns the odor of rotten bread, potato peels, and scorched flesh. It is hard to know what should be regretted most about all this: the abysmal lack of faith in the human imagination to reconstruct the nature of evil from the printed page or even from the photographed image; the mindless delight in all the intricate toys of technology that money can buy; the disparity between the wretched reality of the *anus mundi* in Silesia and this glitter and dazzle and pointless profusion of means in sunny California. I do not suppose that the Wiesenthal Center multimedia project is typical of the whole flurry of American Jewish activity around the subject of the Holocaust, but I do think it is an extreme revelation of an underlying direction of this activity. Mustering all the riches of American electronic gimmickry, the conceivers of the project above all want to make the Holocaust, as they say, an "experience," to sell to the millions. The ultimate aim is not to ponder or remember or understand the Holocaust but to simulate it, and through that simulation to create what can never be created in this spurious manner, a sense of identity.

IN A dozen different ways, we falsify our lives as Jews by setting them so dramatically in the shadow of the crematoria. This sickly taint of genocide spreads farther than one might imagine in contemporary Jewish thinking. Thus, A. J. Heschel, who since his death in 1972 has been made into American Judaism's leading candidate for canonization, has been praised (by Jacob Neusner, among others) for celebrating the spiritual treasures of East European Jewry instead of being obsessed with its annihilation. But in 1965, at the Jerusalem home of a prominent historian of anti-Semitism, I heard Heschel announce that after the Holocaust, no Jewish parent had the moral right to raise his child as a Jew—unless, that is, he could do it out of the conviction that he was bringing the child into an eternal covenant with God—because he might by that conferral of Jewish identity simply be preparing another victim to be slaughtered.

Any such notions, I think, must be strenuously resisted on the most compelling moral grounds, and nothing could illustrate more strikingly how our existence is warped by being viewed in the dark glass of the Holocaust. We can never put out of our minds what happened to our people in Europe, but their reality is not ours, and we are entitled to impart to our children whatever seems good and whole and precious in our lives as Jews without constantly peering in terror at imagined future vistas of boxcars and bayonets. We are entitled, in other words, to the simple substance of normalcy, free from the mesmerizing vision of murders past and potential. No one has stated this with more persuasive succinctness than Jacob Neusner: "The fact is that the living live. The choice is about the future, not the past."

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Toward an Immigration Policy

Samuel Rabinove

LAST MARCH, President Carter signed into law the Refugee Act of 1980, which authorized an increase in the number of refugees admitted each year from 17,400 to 50,000 and, most importantly, eliminated ideological and geographic barriers to admission. It also empowered the President, after consultation with Congress, to authorize additional numbers of refugees where he believes it to be warranted on humanitarian grounds.

The new law expands the definition of refugee to include any person living outside his country who would face persecution upon returning because of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion, and sets forth a comprehensive scheme for admitting, training, and resettling refugees. It also directs the Attorney General to establish a procedure for granting asylum to aliens who are already here, provided they meet the new definition of refugee.

In sum, the law now authorizes regular admission of 50,000 refugees per year, in addition to 270,000 ordinary immigrants. (Actually, it is estimated that in 1980 more than 763,000 refugees and immigrants, including Cubans and Haitians, were admitted to this country; also, the number of refugee admissions for the fiscal year 1981 has been fixed at 217,000, of whom 168,000 will be from Indochina alone.) "Asylum" remains another separate category for which there is no numerical limit.

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The legislators who fashioned the Refugee Act of 1980, however, could not have anticipated the issues raised by the precipitous flood of refugees from the Caribbean, including more than 120,000 Cuban "boat people," either escaping or expelled, and some 15,000 Haitians. While the Cubans could be admitted temporarily as applicants for political asylum, the Haitians at present are not legally eligible for this category. Though the Duvalier regime is scarcely a democratic one, the U.S. government maintained that the Haitians, unlike the Cubans, were fleeing poverty rather than political oppression. This distinction has escaped many supporters of sanctuary for the Haitians who have charged that the real reason for differential treatment of the two groups is the fact that the Haitians are black, to which government spokesmen have replied that many of the Cubans also are black. No final legal disposition of the matter has yet been made.

In the interim, the Carter administration announced that most of the refugees, both Cuban and Haitian, except for criminals, would be allowed to remain on a temporary basis and that Congress would be asked to enact legislation allowing them to become permanent residents after they have lived here for two years, and citizens after another five. Until Congress makes its final decision, the refugees have been granted "parole" status and are eligible for various job and welfare benefits.

Whatever the ultimate disposition of the Caribbean exodus, it has served to reopen the vexing question of U.S. immigration policy in general, which has been simmering beneath the surface for a long time. Public-opinion polls taken in the wake of the Cuban influx revealed that a considerable majority of Americans were opposed to permitting the Cubans to remain here permanently, with many respondents raising the question of why other countries were not taking in their fair share. In a Gallup poll conducted last May, respondents went even further, with 91 percent of the people interviewed expressing the opinion that *all* immigration to the United States should be halted until the national unemployment rate drops to 5 percent. Responding to this mood, the Senate on June 18 approved a resolution urging a limit on the number of immigrants admitted to the United States during the months ahead.

Even more difficult than the problem of fixing limits on legal immigration to the U.S., however, is the problem of illegal immigration. There is now compelling evidence that many more immigrants have been entering the United States outside the legal process than lawfully, or, having entered lawfully, have overstayed their visas. Estimates of their number have ranged from a low of 2 million to a high of 12 million, but one figure is certain: the number of apprehensions made annually by the extremely hard-pressed Immigration and Naturalization Service. In 1977, this figure topped 1 million—which would represent a threefold increase since 1970, though it may be somewhat inflated, since some illegal immigrants may have been apprehended more than once during the year.

The controversy surrounding illegal immigration came to the fore most recently during last year's census. In December of 1979 five Congressmen and the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a group which seeks to halt illegal immigration, brought suit against the Census Bureau, challenging the Bureau's intention of including il-

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legal aliens in its count which would be used as the basis for reapportioning the next Congress and for distributing billions of dollars in federal aid programs. The plaintiffs asserted that the government's plan to include illegal aliens in the count would dilute the political representation of citizens and allot an undue number of congressional seats to states such as Texas and California, which have substantial concentrations of illegal immigrants, at the expense of other states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio, which do not. Pointing out that the census questionnaire furnished no way to distinguish between legal and illegal aliens—in fact, only about one in every five families was even asked to list its citizenship—the suit maintained that counting illegal aliens would violate the constitutional mandate of "one man-one vote." The Census Bureau for its part took the position that historically it has obeyed the provision set forth in Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment and has counted every person in each state, except foreign tourists and diplomats. (When the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified in 1868, of course, there was no such thing as illegal immigration.)

Last February the Bureau was vindicated when a three-judge federal court dismissed the suit primarily on the ground that the plaintiffs could not demonstrate that they personally would incur any loss of representation if illegal aliens were included in the decennial count. The court did say, however, that a suit on the issue of apportionment could be brought after the census was completed and it became clear which states had won and which had lost congressional seats. Subsequently, the Supreme Court declined to review the decision, thereby letting it stand and, in effect, according *de facto* legitimacy to the presence of illegal aliens in this country and reflecting tacit judicial recognition of the reality that most of them are probably here to stay.

MOST of the illegal aliens in the United States today came here from Mexico. Los Angeles now has more Mexican residents than any city in Mexico except Mexico City, and there are more children of Mexican extraction in the Los Angeles public schools than there are white or black children. Though Mexican Americans have suffered, and continue to suffer, discrimination in the United States, millions of Mexicans still crave the opportunity to become American citizens—and for understandable reasons. Each year almost a million Mexicans enter a labor force in which roughly half of the workers are either unemployed or underemployed. The population of Mexico has nearly tripled since 1945 (to about 65 million) and is expected to double in the next twenty years. Per-capita annual income in 1977 was $1,020, compared with $8,520 in the United States. Food production has not kept up with population growth, nor is there any effective social-security or unemployment-insurance program. It is no surprise, therefore, that untold numbers of Mexicans steal across the inadequately patrolled 2,000 mile-long border into the United States every year.

Should they be allowed to stay? There is a body of opinion in this country, particularly in the liberal community, which advocates amnesty for all illegal immigrants (the preferred terminology is "undocumented workers") presently here. In this view, the illegal aliens, whether from Mexico or from any of the other countries which also produce sizable numbers of immigrants, have come to the United States for the very same reason that prior generations of immigrants, both legal and illegal, came here—because America is the land of freedom and opportunity. The case is made that they are generally law-abiding and productive people; that they work at jobs that most Americans shun—hard, dirty, backbreaking labor at low wages; that certain businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and the garment trades would have great difficulty operating without them; that the kind of stoop labor these immigrants perform for the big growers in the Southwest, for example, reinforces American agriculture and helps to keep our food prices from rising even further.

According to these arguments, our economy needs these workers as much as they need us, and they are far more of a boon to our society than a burden. (Vilma Martinez, president of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, believes they deserve to be called "undocumented taxpayers.") Finally, many of these aliens now have children who were born in America and it would be unthinkable to deport part of a family. Yet they live in constant dread of detection and deportation. Those favoring wholesale amnesty for such workers claim that granting it would merely regularize what is happening anyway, and would enable the immigrants to come out into the open.

As against all this, others argue, illegal aliens, often working at substandard wages, compound our unemployment problem by taking good jobs away from Americans. In December 1979, Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall declared that the impact of illegal aliens on American workers was generally underestimated. "One of the lowest estimates of the number of illegal workers in the United States is 4 million," according to Marshall. "If only half, or 2 million of them, are in jobs that would otherwise be held by U.S. workers, eliminating this displacement would bring unemployment down to 3.7 percent, which is below the 4 percent full-employment target set by the Humphrey-Hawkins Act." Some American blacks have expressed grave concern over job competition by illegal aliens and its impact on black unemployment; the potential exists for serious social conflict. Ironically, since so many of the illegal aliens are either Hispanics or blacks from Caribbean countries, if they were to be granted amnesty, under existing government regulations they too would be entitled instantly and automatically to preferential treatment in employment under affirmative-action programs.

THERE are even more persuasive arguments against granting amnesty to illegal immigrants. To

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begin with, it would condone the flagrant violation of our laws on a massive scale—if we tacitly ratify illegal immigration, we would be giving lawbreakers an unfair advantage and indirectly penalizing those who have been patiently waiting their turn to enter lawfully, some for many years. Secondly, it would have a massive multiplier effect, entitling the several million immigrants now here to bring in—under the traditional family-reunification principle—wives, husbands, children, parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters, which could seriously burden our social-welfare services for a long time to come. Thirdly, it would serve as a magnet to draw millions of others from abroad who wish to come here, in the not unreasonable anticipation of a subsequent amnesty several years hence.

If such prospects do not daunt many proponents of amnesty it is because, at bottom, what they would really prefer is to scrap all immigration restrictions and simply open our borders to all who wish to come. But as opponents of amnesty have stressed, the United States today has the most generous immigration policy in the world. Our capacity, however, is no longer boundless (as it was, say, a hundred years ago). The U.S. cannot possibly absorb the hundreds of millions of poor people throughout the world who, quite understandably, would love to settle in this country. Our increasingly scarce vital resources will not allow it, and our multiple economic problems are already serious enough without encouraging the entry of many millions of new immigrants who would compound these problems and diminish our standard of living significantly.

AT PRESENT, the amnesty question is on "hold." Three years ago President Carter proposed, simultaneously, an amnesty for illegal aliens who came here prior to 1970, a reinforced border patrol, and penalties for employers who hire illegal aliens. Congress avoided the problem at that time by establishing the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy, which would not submit its final report until 1981. The 16-member commission is charged with evaluating existing laws, policies, and procedures and with preparing recommendations to the President and the Congress. The commission must not only seek to answer immediate questions (how many immigrants should be admitted, which countries should they come from, what should be the criteria for admission), but also take up far-ranging matters of policy: What is the impact of immigration and refugee policy on employment and economic growth? How can the process by which the United States accepts, excludes, apprehends, deports, or adjusts the status of immigrants be improved to make it more humane, lawful, and efficient? To appreciate the magnitude of the task, one must bear in mind that the State Department now receives about 4 million applications each year from people who want to settle in the United States.

As of this writing, the commission appears likely to recommend some form of amnesty for illegal aliens now here, penalties for employers who hire illegal aliens, more effective measures to control future illegal immigration, proposals to reduce the long wait for American visas in certain countries, explicit disavowal of race as a factor in immigration policy, a separate category to assure that the U.S. will be constantly renewed with fresh infusions of talented "seed immigrants" who may have no family in this country, and an increase in the number of ordinary immigrants to 350,000 annually. The commission has also explored the concept of a worldwide target for total immigration to the United States which could be adjusted each year to take into account various factors on the domestic and international scene, such as the flow of refugees and the level of unemployment in this country.

THE Select Commission, however, has been sharply divided on a number of the key issues before it, and majority and dissenting statements are likely. Nor is there assurance that any of its final recommendations (due March 1) will win quick legislative approval. In fact, the history of immigration policy is replete with studies and recommendations that were never adopted. But whatever the immigration policy that is ultimately established by law, it will be undermined unless the government can summon the will, and the political courage, to enforce that law. Right now, the painful reality is that immigration is out of control. As long as more immigrants enter the United States unlawfully than lawfully, and are in the main allowed to do so with impunity, they will continue to make a mockery of our immigration law, transforming it into a kind of game: if you can manage to sneak in, you stay. To expect a total stoppage is unrealistic, but it is imperative that the necessary steps be taken to cut the torrent of illegal aliens to a trickle.

For one thing, the understaffed (and demoralized) Immigration and Naturalization Service must be given the additional resources it needs to seal the now porous Mexican border. Although the Immigration and Naturalization Service has two basic functions, service and enforcement, it has not been equipped to perform either task adequately. Attacked by liberals for laxity in service to immigrants and by conservatives for laxity in border enforcement, some employees of the INS have, not surprisingly, become harsh, corrupt, or cynical. The first step toward a clearly defined national immigration policy capable of being realistically implemented is a revitalization of the INS to enable it to do its job properly.

Another measure that should be taken to stem the tide of illegal immigrants would be to remove the job incentive by enacting a federal law forbidding employers from hiring illegal aliens, coupled with a forgery-proof work-identification card to enable employers to comply with the law without difficulty or unfairness to those who are here lawfully. The civil-libertarian argument that such a scheme (which has been debated intensely within the Select Commission) would jeopardize the fundamental free-

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doms of our citizens or deter the hiring of Hispanics is alarmist nonsense—only in America, one might say, is a proposal to prohibit employment of persons who have no legal right to be here viewed as a major threat to civil liberties. Tens of millions of Americans, moreover, have been carrying Social Security cards since 1935, and the dark night of fascism has not enveloped us yet.

Along with the work card, it might also be desirable to establish some sort of temporary or guest-worker status, since many of the Mexicans who cross the border to work in the United States evidently do not wish to settle here permanently. They could then take jobs which have not been filled by citizens or legal resident aliens, although it would be essential for the government to prevent their exploitation by employers (as happened under the discredited "bracero" program between 1942 and 1964).

But even as such measures are being considered, it is most important, in view of the special economic and cultural ties we have with Mexico, to liberalize current restrictions on permanent legal Mexican immigration as far as is reasonably possible. A similar case may be made for immigrants from other neighboring countries, such as Cuba and Haiti, though there is no reason why other countries in the Western hemisphere, like Canada, Venezuela, Peru, and Costa Rica, should not take in at least some of the immigrants.

In general, to resolve the current immigration dilemma, it is critical that we fortify the distinction between legal and illegal immigration to these shores. Unless we do so, there is a growing likelihood that public resentment of illegal immigrants will continue to spill over onto lawful immigrants as well. If a groundswell of opinion were to develop in favor of drastic curtailment of *lawful* immigration—as has occurred in years past—it would be no less a misfortune for America than for all those would-be immigrants whose aspirations for a better life in this country might be thwarted indefinitely, if not forever.

John Lennon's Mourners

Dorothy Rabinowitz

WITHIN hours of the news of John Lennon's murder last December it became clear that an event was in the making that was something more than still another display of the kind of collective mourning that followed the assassinations of the 1960's. There was, to be sure, no lack of those features which are now the standard accompaniment of such occasions: the army of television reporters who would provide virtually unbroken coverage of the Lennon story for the next four days; the throngs of weeping mourners in black arm bands outside the Dakota, Lennon's apartment building, whose activities were to provide that coverage with its sole theme and content. They had come, young and not so young, from far and wide, to stand in the streets and bear public testimony to their mourning for Lennon. In the days and the cold nights that followed, the crowd in front of the Dakota grew ever larger and more emotional while remaining miraculously clear—under the circumstances—about the reasons that had summoned them here. They had come, the mourners explained, to pay homage to a symbol of their youth and idealism. A twenty-eight-year-old mother, arriving with her small daughter, pointed out, "We lost more than John Lennon, we lost our adolescence. So everyone is here more or less to mourn." Another woman testified, in a letter written to a magazine immediately after the Lennon murder, that, despite being robbed of every one of its heroes, hers was a generation which passionately cared about freedom and the essential values of human life. She felt, wrote the woman, "proud and lucky to have grown up in the 60's . . . and grateful that we had John Lennon and the Beatles to express our impatience, our resilience, and our vision of a better world."

It was a response which found an echo in the journalistic outpouring of commentary on Lennon, one which further confirmed what was clear from the outset: that the spectacle of public mourning triggered by John Lennon's death had a function altogether different from the by now institutionalized phenomenon of collective grieving to which recent history has accustomed us. The difference, simply put, was that the principal subject of the tributes and of the eulogizing occasioned by this particular assassination was none other than the mourners themselves.

Nowhere was this phenomenon more in evidence than on the occasion which crowned the week, the two o'clock prayer vigil for

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John Lennon. A full-blown media event, the vigil, as most of the world by now knows, consisted of ten full minutes of silent prayer, the major observance of which was held in Central Park, in New York, Lennon's adopted city, with observances on a small scale elsewhere.

The Sunday of the vigil dawned with evidence of those massive public preparations that themselves help to secure the status of occasions of this sort. Three hundred policemen and a horde of paramedics and ambulances stood by, with another large deployment of both stationed outside the Dakota. (Even longer-range plans for ministering to the well-being of the mourners had been effected some days before, with the announcement that emergency encounter groups were being set up by a cooperative of social workers and psychologists to help people ages fourteen to forty-one to "cope with their grief about Lennon in a peer-group situation.")

THE mourners themselves had begun to gather for the vigil the night before, showing up wrapped in blankets and goose-down and otherwise giving evidence of having made detailed preparations for the coming event; they were, after all, representatives of a generation that, like no other, had an appreciation of *equipment*, not least for occasions, such as this one, of self-testing. They listened intently to the detailed instructions of the master of ceremonies for insuring comfort through the ordeal ahead; then, with the sober air of those who are discharging an important obligation, they attended to the relaxing of their bodies. Finally, at two P.M. the vigil began. Against a background, remarkable in itself, of ten full minutes of air silence unprecedented in television history, the network cameras began focusing on the hordes of mourners. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the events the cameras were to record that day was the nearly uniform look on the faces of those in the crowd, expressions bespeaking self-approbation to a degree that neither the ostentatiousness of grief nor the prayerfulness attendant on this occasion, could in the slightest mask. (Self-approval is, anyway, one of the least easily concealed of human feelings partly because, like any other form of love, it tends to bring a sheen to the eye.)

As the silence continued unbroken, it became clear that the particular requirements of the occasion themselves contributed to the atmosphere of collective self-approbation already abundantly in evidence. For the peaceful coming together of huge numbers of people to unite in silence for ten minutes could not help but call to mind similar assemblages in the 60's (including what was once known as the "miracle of Woodstock"). Like those others, this particular assemblage was clearly intended to testify to the spiritual discipline, strength, and unity of an extraordinary generation. It was not surprising therefore that the ten minutes of silent vigil concluded with an outburst of applause—rightly interpreted by one New York *Times* reporter who wrote, obviously without the slightest ironic intention, that, when the silence was over, the crowd had "applauded themselves."

Along with the demeanor of the participants, the other most remarkable aspect of the vigil was the status bestowed on it as a historic occasion: one of the major television networks interspersed its coverage of the vigil with film clips of the 1963 March on Washington. Elsewhere, notably in the press, the association most frequently made was that between John Lennon and John F. Kennedy, and not merely on the grounds that they had both met their deaths at the hands of an assassin. The theme, as it was expressed generally, and exemplified in the column of the *Times*'s theater critic, Frank Rich, was that John Kennedy's "youthful iconoclastic style" had begun to "change the tenor of American life" and it was the Beatles "who picked up the Kennedy torch" and ran with it. There were, Rich pointed out, additional reasons to view the impact of the Beatles as historical, one being the *Sgt. Pepper* album which "solidified the growing suspicion that rock music could be most fully appreciated when stoned."

For John Leonard, another *Times* critic, the Beatles had symbolized, through their music, the move from a "self in isolation to an ideal community," and had become a "self-ratifying" and perfect community. And Eliot Fremont-Smith in an equally elegiac piece in the *Village Voice* paid tribute to the hope and dimension the Beatles had given his life in the 60's, and to "our survival and energy and pain and anger and irreverent adoring."

From these and many other similar journalistic tributes to Lennon there emerged a single theme: the extraordinary sensitivity, uniqueness, courage, and style of the generation identifying itself with the music and social values of the 60's.

Thus the spectacle attending Lennon's memorializing served primarily as the occasion—the first event in years to provide one—for a collective self-portrait of a generation whose faith in its own special stature may well be its principal distinction and sole enduring accomplishment. The trouble with the portrait, though, was a certain vagueness. In the absence of those political certainties which had once defined them and served as their chief moral credentials—certainties which had been discredited by subsequent events—all that remained to distinguish this particular generation were the ineffable qualities of "feeling," "sensitivity," "openness," "awareness," and so forth.

Still, those in the forefront of the public mourning for Lennon were determined to make do with what they had. The person who spoke best for them all, perhaps, was the young woman fired from her cashier's job at a department store for having closed her eyes for ten minutes at the appointed time of the worldwide Lennon vigil, while serenely ignoring the clamor of enraged customers at her counter. "I'm proud to have stood up for what I believe in," she observed.

IRONICALLY, the object of these observances, John Lennon himself, had told *Playboy* with some annoyance, just a few weeks before his death, that he could not understand why people wanted to attach

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themselves to the 60's forever, or what made them think they could all be twenty again; nor could he comprehend the hostility engendered by his decision to become first of all a family man, entirely devoted to his wife and small son. On reflection, Lennon had further told the *Playboy* interviewer, he could recall only sterility and boredom when he thought about the eternally juvenile grouping represented by life with the boys, the Beatles' "perfect commune." "It's all right when you're sixteen, seventeen, eighteen," Lennon had told the interviewer. "But when it continues and you're still doing it and you're forty, that means you're still sixteen in the head."

Still, neither comments like these, nor Lennon's disavowal just a week or so before he died of art born of the drug culture, nor even his latest album—a celebration of married life—seemed to have any effect on the public image of Lennon called into service at the various official tributes to him, the reason being, again, that it was chiefly themselves the mourners had come to pay tribute to.

Lennon had been, one heard time and again, anti-establishment, irreverent, spiritual, peace-loving; he had changed the course of history, if not the world itself. He had brought the world a message of love and peace. The *New Yorker*, ever alert to the presence of a fresh idea, pointed out "how rare is such a message." It was even claimed by some that Lennon had been a man of surpassing modesty, at heart untouched by his wealth and fame. Each time they met, one music critic pointed out at the vigil, Lennon seemed to be puzzled about his fame and about "all that fuss" being made over him.

The Lennon thus described is the same Lennon, it should be noted, who, irritated by a *Newsweek* reporter who had asked him whether he'd visited any rock clubs lately, snapped, "It's like asking Picasso has he been to the museum lately."

Nor did Lennon appear to subscribe, in his personal life, to that image of selfless spirituality evoked by his mourners and exemplified in one of the anthems most favored by the crowds mourning him: "All you need is love." For this redoubtable business couple, Lennon and Yoko Ono, clearly needed a good deal more than love and set about husbanding it with scrupulous care. The couple's views on this matter were rather succinctly summed up not long ago by Yoko Ono, who said, "You have to see to your own needs first"; afterward one might, presumably, be free to set about changing the world.

So far as their own needs went, the couple had seen to them with extraordinary success and with a degree of caution that included the use of astrological charts to determine which journalists should and which should not be granted publicity interviews. (Before permission was granted to the *Playboy* interviewer to appear, he had received a phone call from Yoko Ono's assistant asking what his astrological sign was.) In the event, at the time of his death, Lennon was worth close to $200 million. One large room of his Dakota cooperative had been set aside exclusively for the storage of his and Yoko Ono's fur coats, as well as for the exquisitely designed and tailored working-class regalia to which they were partial. Lennon owned no fewer than five cooperative apartments in the Dakota, estates in Florida, Delaware, and New York, and dairy farms whose very livestock seemed to testify to the couple's golden touch: a single cow from Lennon's dairy farm brought in, recently, the unprecedented sum of more than a quarter of a million dollars.

"Yes we're rich, so what?" Lennon said to the *Playboy* interviewer. The always candid Lennon pointed out further that he had turned out all those Beatles albums for the money, among other things. Small wonder, given these unapologetic testimonials to the acquisitive impulse, that the *Playboy* interview was distressing to some. As John Leonard observed in his memorial essay on Lennon, "We didn't need [it]."

IF THERE was, in the goings-on about Lennon's death, another quality besides the mass self-adulation on display which was quintessentially of the era and the politics being represented, it was the nearly uniform obeisance to those goings-on. There was something remarkable in the spate of unabashedly reverent reflections on their own youthfulness expressed by the mourners, reflections broadcast with a confidence suggesting that the world at large was no less preoccupied with the subject than they were themselves. At no time during the week in question (with the exception of a lone New York City councilman) did there appear to be any public awareness that there might be something amiss, or at least doubtful, about so indulgent and brazenly narcissistic an extravaganza: that there might be something distinctly bizarre in the notion, prominently put about, that John Lennon had taken up and run with the torch of a fallen President of the United States, or that the Lennon vigil was in magnitude and political significance on the order of the civil-rights March on Washington. In eliciting this acquiescent response, the mourning rituals for Lennon reevoked for a moment the atmosphere of the 60's: the cowed silence that once prevailed in the face of the ludicrous claims and pretensions of the 60's activists, not to mention their assaults, violent and otherwise, on free speech, mounted in the name of idealism.

There is no better testimony to the persistence of that climate than that provided by *Newsweek* commentator Meg Greenfield. Her analysis of the Lennon memorials and their participants did, to be sure, express a moment's hesitation about certain excesses of the generation they represented, but the main point was clear: the 60's generation deserved to be respected. With the archness which is itself an eloquent signal of the social terrors of taking on the young, Miss Greenfield, noting first that she belonged to "regressive" and "hypocritical elements," confessed that she had found, in the self-absorption of the 60's activists, an aspect that was "almost comic." Yet she was nervous, Miss Greenfield further confessed, about using a word like comic to

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describe the 60's idealists; it was "a measure of the power that time still has to intimidate us."

It is in the columnist's final remarks, however, and not in this volunteered confession that the real extent of that intimidation, masquerading—just as it did throughout the 60's, as tolerance and understanding—stands revealed. (Trust the tale, not the teller, was D.H. Lawrence's eternally useful advice.) Her kind, Miss Greenfield observes, were "panicked by" the moral self-certainty of the 60's generation, envied their moral energy, and were, "relative to these people, paralyzed." Whatever doubts Meg Greenfield may have about the political consequences of 60's activism, she stifles them in a final, respectful tribute to the 60's generation's "achievements, its follies, its sweep."

Perhaps it is only fitting, then, given what the real sum of those achievements comes down to—the enduring myth of specialness—that the political generation which has been celebrating itself these many years for its activism and for the mark it left on the world should today be offering up, as the chief vehicle for the display of its idealism and valor, its allegiance to the Beatles.

Movies

The Aging of the New Wave

Richard Grenier

It was a historic event of sorts. The twentieth anniversary of the birth of the French New Wave, or *Nouvelle Vague*. *What? Twenty years already?* was the reaction of the French public, but not of the *Nouvelle Vague*'s founding fathers. The world had changed too much. Their temporary alliance had been shattered long ago. There was too much bitterness. No longer considered a unified or even coherent movement except perhaps abroad, the group would hardly have gathered in fond recollection. But as it happened, in the fall of 1980 the vagaries of movie production brought about the nearly simultaneous release in Paris of the latest films of François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, and Jean-Luc Godard (the last after a silence of ten years). A *Nouvelle Vague* outrider, Louis Malle, also had a new movie, and another, Alain Resnais, had produced a major effort just a few months before.

The press could hardly have been expected to miss this appointment with destiny. French critics, with twenty years to have thought it over, came up with more sensible evaluations of the movement than they had been capable of producing in the first frenzy of discovery—particularly the team of the newsweekly *L'Express*, which, in coining the phrase *Nouvelle Vague*, had given the movement a name, one of its main assets.

It had not been a homogeneous group to start with, united perhaps principally by an adolescent passion for the cinema. At first, amateurs inspired by an ardent and sometimes moving sincerity, they made "little" films without stars or carefully written dialogue, shot in natural surroundings away from studio sound stages. Then each took his separate path. Like other successful directors they now make films with stars, on sound stages, from written screenplays. They also make snide remarks about each other's movies. Godard and Truffaut, in particular, have exchanged charges of the most deadly acrimony and are no longer on speaking terms. All nearing fifty, they have melded into the "quality" wing of the French movie business, become Grand Middle-Aged Men of the French cinema. But is this all there is to be said about this band of febrile Young Turks who twenty years ago so seized the imagination of the world's film audiences?

Without tracing the artistic growth (or shrinkage) of each member of this famous group, I would like to provide something of the political and social context in which they evolved. In America, of course, they were seen as emerging in an almost complete social vacuum. But even in France it was not widely realized how closely their appearance was tied to the return to power of General de Gaulle and the creation of France's Fifth Republic.

I think no one will quarrel with my statement that de Gaulle was a single-minded, ardent supporter of French greatness in all fields. He

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wanted a "new" French cinema, a "great" French cinema, a French cinema admired throughout the world. And if the arrival of this new French cinema coincided exactly with the rebirth of France under the Fifth Republic, so much the better. When an old-line representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs leaned over during a special screening of Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* and asked de Gaulle's newly appointed Minister of Culture, André Malraux, if they should really send this film as France's official entry to the Cannes Film Festival, the answer was: *"Mais oui! Mais oui!"*

France has special provisions requiring that the entertainment tax paid by customers at movie ticket windows be returned to the film's producer, and also a quite extraordinary procedure for encouraging artistic excellence whereby outright grants out of tax monies are given to ambitious, quality film projects—grants which in the era of moderate-budget "small" films could occasionally amount to half the film's production budget. The *Nouvelle Vague* benefited greatly from this kind of government support.*

To get back to de Gaulle: when France's great skiing champion, Jean-Claude Killy—winner of three gold medals at the winter Olympics of Grenoble in 1968—was asked if he had been nervous before his spectacular *tour de force*, he laughed and replied, "Less nervous than de Gaulle." And if de Gaulle wanted France's skiers to be admired the world over, how much more did he want its film-makers to win gold medals in the grand slalom of the international movie world—provided, of course, that they didn't rock the boat politically.

Judging by their social backgrounds, the members of the *Nouvelle Vague* would not be thought predisposed to boat-rocking. By and large, these backgrounds ranged from well-to-do to frankly rich. Godard is the grandson of a Swiss banker, Chabrol's father was president of the National Association of Pharmacists, Malle is the scion of a celebrated French industrial dynasty. The only one of the group to qualify as even lower-middle class was Truffaut and he, through his passion and seeming vulnerability, had a talent for ingratiating himself with powerful protectors. He married, in any case, the daughter of a wealthy French film producer, who financed his first films. (In other interesting marital alliances, Resnais married the daughter of André Malraux and Godard the granddaughter of François Mauriac.)

There is some irony in the fact that while in America fevered young critics were saluting the greatness of a country like France where *film critics* were able to make movies, in actual fact France's best critics never made films at all, and those who did had money, theirs or their families' or their wives' families.' In any event, the "window of opportunity" was not open long. A dozen or so new names slipped through, but after two or three years the commercial fad for the starless, small-budget movie was over and it became as hard for a new director to get started in France as it had ever been before.

IT WOULD be a distortion, however, and demeaning, to label the *Nouvelle Vague* simply a politically toothless band of well-to-do young enthusiasts. Indeed, as the radicalism of the 60's unfurled, Godard, of the original group, and perhaps half of the outriders and skirmishers and latecomers to the movement revealed, or developed, radically left-wing opinions. But at the moment of the group's inception, in the late 50's and very early 60's, it was deeply apolitical. An immediate payoff for its Gaullist patrons was that, while France in those years was in the last and most violent throes of the Algerian war, not a single one of these "revolutionary" directors (with the ambiguous exception of Godard and his *The Little Soldier*) would touch the Algerian war with a barge pole. Nor did they march in the streets, or carry posters, or even sign petitions. Chabrol recalls a meeting when the *Nouvelle Vague*'s leaders were gathered in one of their homes listening to a "murky" speech by Eric Rohmer (*My Night at Maud's, Claire's Knee*), of which all he can remember is the conclusion: "We must vote for Pinay!" (The equivalent would be a gang of artistic hotheads gathering in America in the early 50's to listen to a plea for Robert A. Taft.)

But the watchword of the movement, accepted at the time, was Truffaut's lapidary phrase: "A man votes. The artist does not." On the face of it, a magnificent statement about the responsibility of the artist to a higher truth than mere political advocacy, the maxim actually conceals a deep-seated feeling on the part of the speaker that movies are really more important than the sort of thing people vote for. This in turn has as a kind of left-handed corollary the belief that a man can have a full experience of life and culture by simply going to the movies. Chabrol has said, "When Truffaut arrives in Bogota, the first thing he does is find out what's playing at the nearest movie house."† In the longer view, the leaders of the *Nouvelle Vague*, exhibiting a huge and obsessive displacement from art in general to the cinema alone, were the spiritual descendants of such French aesthetes as Jean Cocteau who, working on Diaghilev's *Parade* with Picasso and Eric Satie, could in 1916, in the middle of a vast carnage in

* Those who do not realize the seriousness with which "art" movies are taken in Europe should know that the rating given the last film of the late Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini was decided by personal intervention of French President Giscard d'Estaing, and that the rating for Japan's remarkable *The Empire of the Senses* was the subject of heated discussion between Giscard d'Estaing and West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt at one of their semiannual meetings. After grave debate with both the French President and Prime Minister, Malraux's successor, Culture Minister Michel Guy, although fully warned, made the issue a question of conscience, issued the Japanese film the equivalent of an "R," rather than an "X," certificate, and was obliged to resign in consequence. The matter was considered an affair of state.

† I have had this experience with Truffaut myself. When I saw him after his first extended stay in Los Angeles—source of so much of his imaginary life—and asked him what he thought of the place, he told me what films had been on.

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which millions of soldiers were to die, cry out: "The battle for *Parade* is the greatest battle of the war!"

But in view of what was to come, much turns on what is understood by "apolitical." It is often said that most so-called apolitical people are in fact passive conservatives. But "conservative" has more than one meaning, depending on what is to be conserved: the traditional values of a national culture, or mere respect for social convention—which could itself be shifting rapidly under the pressure of events. It was clear that in the early years of the Fifth Republic it was people simply called "conservative" who rallied to de Gaulle. But earlier—in 1940? Did most French "conservatives" give their hearts and souls to de Gaulle's Free French or to Pétain's collaborators with Nazi Germany? It turned out that most conservatives of the time were of the conformist, short-sighted, uncourageous sort and went with Pétain and collaboration. It is a sinister precedent for today, when the new form of the appeasement-collaboration mentality is called Finlandization, or, perhaps more accurately, self-Finlandization.

The Algerian war came and went in France. But although it brought a governmental crisis, de Gaulle, and a new constitution, it produced nothing like the moral convulsion engendered by the Vietnam war in the United States. It is my view that despite all the talk of the past being forgotten (in France as elsewhere), and the young knowing nothing of history, the decisive and searing experience that marked the French soul for a generation, even to this day, was the conquest of France by Nazi Germany and, even more so, its massive, humiliating, collaboration with the enemy during the Occupation.

THE centerpiece of the *Nouvelle Vague*'s return in France this fall was François Truffaut's *The Last Metro*, a story of the Paris theater under this same Nazi Occupation. It received ecstatic critical praise and, more unusual for Truffaut, was a giant box-office hit, leading all other French-made films released in Paris during 1980, several notches ahead of even that luminous import, *The Empire Strikes Back* (which will give an idea of the size of its audience). I must stress that the facts of French collaboration with the Nazis are very well known: unmistakable to survivors of the period, available in the years immediately following the war to those who read books, and shocking the conscience of even those who get their historical information from films with the appearance ten years ago of Marcel Ophuls's *The Sorrow and the Pity*. For further enlightenment, there have also been several books and a documentary film devoted specifically to collaboration in the show-business world—a chilling spectacle.

We see little of this in *The Last Metro*. The Truffaut film is both clumsily written (by Truffaut and his former script girl, Suzanne Schiffman) and ineptly directed. Its acting is wooden. Its power to evoke the feeling of Occupied France—so overwhelming in Louis Malle's *Lacombe Lucien*—is nil. The suspicion therefore hangs in the air that the movie's success is due not to intrinsic merit, but to the fact that, in some essential way, it has been telling French audiences what they want to hear.

The film's opening sequences—in which the wartime blackout seems to be very spottily observed—shows us boy (Gérard Depardieu) flirting with girl (Andréa Ferréol). Girl turns out to be a lesbian, the delightfully humorous results of which can be imagined. But after all, are we not in the mad, irrepressible, lovable world of show business, war or no war, Occupation or no Occupation? Arriving at the (fictitious) Théâtre de Montmartre, at which Depardieu is a new actor and Andréa Ferréol the set designer, we come to the real beginning of the story. A star of French stage and screen (Catherine Deneuve) is preparing to act the leading role in a new play at her husband's theater. Next we learn that the husband, a Jew (Heinz Benent), has fled abroad, only to discover a few moments later that he has not fled abroad at all but is hiding in the cellar of his own theater, adroitly monitoring rehearsals through the ventilation ducts, and managing in the end to direct the play successfully after all. So with a comic stagehand here, a little surreptitious necking between lesbians there, and even an incipient liaison between the star and her leading man, life goes on despite the stacks of German military caps in the cloakroom, until the Liberation comes and all walk happily in God's sunlight once again. Around this thin story Truffaut has woven a dozen subplots intended to convey the warp and woof of the times, France under the Occupation.

Thus there is a lovable young Jewish girl, wearing a large, yellow Star of David, who runs back and forth bringing the actors their costumes, because her costume-maker parents, with their foreign accents, are afraid to leave home. (Catherine Deneuve, of course, would never agree to drop any Jewish associates.) This same Jewish girl later succeeds in coming to the play's opening night by simply covering her Star of David with a scarf. There is also a Jewish fireman, cheerfully on duty backstage, also emblazoned with the yellow star of shame, showing us Jew and Gentile in happy cooperation, Frenchmen all. To celebrate opening night, the cast goes to a nightclub filled with German officers, where the star performer sings with embarrassing feeling, *Bei Mir Bist Du Shayn*—a Yiddish song and instantly recognizable as such by any German—thereby "putting one over" on the Nazi occupier. To be allowed to continue acting, Depardieu, reluctantly, signs an affidavit that he is not Jewish, but redeems himself by obscure Resistance talk and, in one of the film's high points, punching out a collaborationist anti-Semitic theater critic who has condemned the play.

We are made aware that there are nasty Nazi collaborators out there, of course. The central characters read press notices condemning the "Judaized" French theater and listen to dementedly anti-Semitic radio broadcasts. At one point Catherine Deneuve explodes:

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"Who are these people? Yesterday they were nothing! Today they rule France." But in the cozy little world of our theater all are patriots, all love Jews, none seeks to advance himself by currying favor with his Nazi masters. When Depardieu announces histrionically, "I am leaving the theater to join the Resistance!" Deneuve finally yields to him, garterbelt to the fore. "Yes! Yes! Yes!" she whispers. Evil may or may not be banal (*pace* Hannah Arendt), but in this complacent film, filled with patriotic goody-goodies, it is a considerable rarity. The only interesting or complex role, played by Jean-Louis Richard with an eerie sanctimony, is that of the collaborationist theater critic. Rest assured, he loses an eye in the bombardment of Hamburg, and dies of cancer in Madrid, punished by man and God.

IT IS extraordinary that Truffaut, in his comments on *The Last Metro*, has presented himself as the courageous reporter of the squalor of Occupied France. "Even ten years ago I don't think the film would have been taken well," he has said, placing himself alongside the author of *The Sorrow and the Pity*, as one who bravely reveals the sordid truth. Given that the French entertainment world has been singled out over and over as particularly replusive in its collaboration with the Nazis, Truffaut's film, to the contrary, is a shameless whitewash. When star Deneuve cries, "Who are these people?" she gives the impression that the Germans had to sweep the gutters of Paris to find vermin low enough to do their bidding. But in fact the list of French theatrical and literary collaborators was glittering and star-studded, a real "A" list which included Drieu la Rochelle (France's Scott Fitzgerald) and Sacha Guitry (France's John Barrymore) as well as—ranging from the feverishly anti-Semitic through the "Pétainist" to the merely opportunistic—Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Henry de Montherlant, Jean Giono, Arletty (star of *Children of Paradise*), Danielle Darrieux, Vivianne Romance, Marcel Carné, and many more. The list is long and disturbing. It was as if America had been conquered by the Nazis and William Faulkner, Hemingway, Clark Gable, Bette Davis, John Ford, Frank Sinatra, Lana Turner, and Ava Gardner had rushed to embrace the Nazi conqueror, invited him into their homes, or beds (when appropriate), toured Germany (to promote "peace and friendship"), and flown about in Goering's private plane. It would have been a national humiliation in America, and France was no different.

To continue the comparison: the most famous intellectual among the 30-40,000 Frenchmen executed for collaboration was Robert Brassilach, a brilliant young 30's writer, journalist, and editor, raised to great heights by the Germans as editor of the famous pro-Nazi weekly, *Je Suis Partout*. To find a very approximate equivalent, one can try to imagine the collaboration of, say, Time-Life with the Nazis, followed by the later execution of Henry Luce by firing squad. Would this have been considered the elimination of a mere "nothing"? The crackle of the executioners' rifles would have been heard in every town in America. And so it was in France.

SO BY giving the impression that the collaborators were simply vile nobodies, showing us in the foreground a band of Paris theatricals of truly exemplary patriotism, idealism, and philo-Semitism, and sprinkling the whole copiously with rosewater, Truffaut has provided in *The Last Metro* an intensely flattering picture of France under the German Occupation. Small wonder that crowds of his compatriots are flocking to see his movie. First of all, it tells them that "life goes on." Yes, the horrid Nazis rule France, but boy still flirts with girl (romance), the substitute theater director is homosexual (tolerance), and would not dream of usurping the hidden Jewish director's position (honor). Room is even found for that staple of French literature, theater, and cinema, the classic sexual triangle (Deneuve-Depardieu-Benent), and what better example can there be of the permanence of French values than that?

There is little mystery about what this movie tells the audience. France and the French are indomitable. Even conquerors as ferocious as the Nazis could not crush the love of freedom in the French heart, or stamp out France's humane values, *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, seasoned with *joie de vivre*.

At one point two Gestapo agents suddenly appear backstage at the theater and prepare to search the cellar where the Jewish director is hiding, but the extended arm of a roly-poly stagehand prevents them from passing. The Gestapo men fume with bellicosity, gesticulate like villains in a bad silent movie, but the lovable arm does not budge: *they shall not pass*. One wonders if Truffaut has given any thought to what it would take to stop two murderous Gestapo agents on the scent of their prey. The whole film exists on this level of reality, that of a patriotic daydream.

FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT is not a sophisticated political thinker. His gift has always been for autobiography, particularly for the experiences of his adolescence and very early manhood. When it comes to behavior in the fully adult world his talent thins out. He has little power of imagination and his sense of how people behave in circumstances he has not witnessed himself is often, as I have said, drawn from movies. I suspect, for example, that the notion of the hidden Jew in the cellar was suggested by *The Diary of Anne Frank* (the film, not the book); the idea of a stage director secretly guiding the performances in a stage production by a comparable device in the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musical *The Barclays of Broadway*; and the florid declaration of a minor actress's naked ambition by the character of Anne Baxter in *All About Eve*.

To a man who draws his knowledge of the world from such sources I would not want to attribute more conscious political intentions in this film than would seem reasonable. I am sure that Truffaut is aware that his country at the moment is following a policy of be-

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nign accommodation with both the Soviet Union and OPEC. (He says its policy is not "pro-Arab," only "pro-oil.") In the political pages of journals in which he reads mainly the film reviews he might even have come across the world "Finlandized." But I think it extremely unlikely that he sees any connection between his new film and France's reported Finlandization. I think it equally unlikely that the film's audiences make a conscious connection. But the connection is there for those who want to see it: any blunting of the memory of the degradations of the Nazi Occupation, or any "soft" romantic denial of the Nazis' grim ability to crush the spirit of nearly all who fell into their grasp, represents a decline in the awareness of what it can ultimately be like to fall under the domination of a totalitarian state.

It is interesting to note in this connection that French publishers' autumn lists for 1980 suddenly carried no fewer than eleven sizable new novels set in the period of the Nazi Occupation, many written by authors not yet born when the war ended. It's the latest rage. The black hours of national shame, the savagery of the jackbooted victor, have now suddenly become comfortable, the background for romantic fancy. Something seems to be in the air.

CLAUDE CHABROL is another "apolitical" *Nouvelle Vague* member of the go-with-the-flow sort, his career checkered even by *Nouvelle Vague* standards. Fallen to the level of an ordinary commercial director, he has done little of artistic merit over the years. But 1980 was heralded as his return to his real sources, the simple provincial villagers who were the subject of his first film, *Le Beau Serge*. For another rage has been sweeping France as well. Five years ago *Montaillou*, a scholarly study of village life in the Pyrenees district of France in the 13th century, reconstructed from the records of a local Inquisition, became a surprise best seller. And *Le Cheval d'Orgeuil*, a simple memoir of village life in backward Brittany at the beginning of the 20th century, also published in the mid-70's, has turned out to be France's best-selling book of the entire decade.

Chabrol, seizing the opportunity, chose this book as the subject of his movie. The film's title, literally "The Horse of Pride," is drawn from a Breton proverb to the effect that a man too poor to buy a horse can always mount his pride, a more eloquent equivalent of our own notion of "poor but proud." The title is a good one in that the film is indeed an effort to portray the virtue and even nobility of the life of poor peasants in a Breton Arcadia. Gaelic-speaking, heavily illiterate, pre-industrial Brittany was of course no Arcadia, and the mighty cultural struggle which shook it, pitting the militantly anti-clerical republic against the royalist Church, is barely touched on.

Although the film was given a sympathetic reception by both critics and public, the final verdict of both audiences and press seemed to be that *Le Cheval d'Orgeuil* was prettified and bogus, the beautiful peasant costumes too clean, the characters too simple and cheerful. So the urge to find serenity in the secure values of a distant national past—a psychological perennial particularly acute at times of doubt and moral turmoil—has yet to find gratifying expression in the French cinema.

THEN there are the True Believers, those film-makers associated with the *Nouvelle Vague*, or who came up in the succeeding years, who in time became firmly committed to the goals of the radical Left —never as neatly demarcated in France from ordinary Communist fellow-traveling as it was in the U.S. of the New Left and its Port Huron Statement. With America in retreat, and France doing so much to ingratiate itself with both the "socialist" and "third" worlds, should not the French radical Left be putting out flags?

Alain Resnais is an unassuming director in that he gives full credit in the creation of his films to the authors of their screenplays. His anti-nuclear-bomb (and anti-American) *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* is as much the work of Marguerite Duras, the novelist, as of Resnais, and his *Last Year in Marienbad* is probably even more the work of the novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet. Resnais has made films on other subjects, but has been quite reliable in his anti-Americanism (although he loves to visit the U.S.) and in his general soppiness about all figures from the "Left," whether they be anti-nuclear Japanese, Spanish Republicans in exile, or Leon Trotsky. (Trotsky is portrayed in his *Stavisky* as a character somewhere between St. Francis of Assisi and Gandhi.) Recently, however, Resnais has fallen under the spell of Henri Laborit, France's exponent of that modish school of pop zoology which explains man's behavior, apparently so civilized and complex, as proceeding directly and ineluctably from the animal within him. Resnais's new film, *Mon Oncle d'Amérique* (on which Laborit collaborated), in addition to receiving high praise from the press and splitting the top award at Cannes with the new Kurosawa film, was almost as big a commercial success in the spring of 1980 as Truffaut's *The Last Metro* was in the fall.

The title, again, requires explanation. "An American Uncle," in jocular French parlance, is a lost relative who has made a fortune in some far-off place, dies, and unexpectedly leaves his fortune to a nephew at home. By extension it means any marvelous windfall, and in Resnais's picture, somewhat tortuously, it seems to mean the dream of happiness. The characters in *Mon Oncle d'Amérique* think they are pursuing happiness, but repeated, labored cross-cutting between the human characters and white laboratory rats instructs us that human behavior is really no different from that of rats.

I cannot express the tedium with which one beholds first a businessman in a tense situation, then a rat receiving electric shocks in his cage, in order to be instructed on the sound track that the rat gets pretty nervous too. A man leaves his wife? We see a rat leave a cage where he is receiving shocks to enter a cage where he does *not* receive shocks. And, *mirabile dictu*, when shocks are coming in from all over, a rat

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who takes out his frustrations by fighting and subduing other rats somehow feels better about things. Hence, human aggression.

The film ends with a plea that we learn more about animal psychology the better to deal with this accursed human lust for dominance. Although the whole story has taken place in France, the last image in the movie is a long, almost doting shot of the bombed-out Charlotte Street area of New York's South Bronx—presumably the most extreme example of man's aggressiveness to man.

Dismissing the idiocy of the Charlotte Street ending, and the title's cheap-shot secondary meaning ("If there's no happiness, there's certainly no happiness in America"), the film is based on a pessimistic psycho-zoological determinism completely at variance with almost every shade of leftist-liberal thinking. The followers of that other laborer in the vineyards of animal psychology, Robert Ardrey, are certainly adamant conservatives. Resnais's film, throwing up its hands and saying in effect, "What do you expect? We're all just rats," brings to mind the old religious cleavage in political theory, with believers in the concept of Original Sin almost by definition on the Right, as defined at the time, and those believing in the Perfectibility of Man on the Left. (The French press responded roughly according to this old alignment, with the centrist, pro-Atlantic *L'Express* having nothing but praise for the film, the leftist *Nouvel Observateur* expressing reservations about its simplism, and the New Left *Libération* uttering a *cri de coeur* against the "molecular destiny" it offers—"No uncle!" it cried in dismay. "No America!")

Called on to defend his pessimistic views of human behavior, Resnais would probably answer with some variant of, "All men are rats, but some are more rats than others," no doubt adding that the film closes on an optimistic note. Nevertheless it is a peculiar view of human nature for an ostensible advocate of the perfectibility-of-man to be espousing. There is no doubt in my mind that the attitude is related to the latent yearning for authoritarianism of any description among so many members of the radical Left. Its appearance in Resnais at the very time his country is coming more and more under the influence of an authoritarian power is perhaps just coincidence. No doubt the predisposition existed in him all along.

Louis Malle (*The Lovers, Murmur of the Heart*), though also nearing his twentieth anniversary as a movie director, has taken himself out of the French cinema by moving to America, where his recent flaccid films (*Pretty Baby, Atlantic City*) have little relevance to what is going on in his home country. This is a true abandonment of French cinema at a key moment by an extraordinarily talented director, two of whose brilliant earlier films had been closely connected to the Nazi Occupation. His *Lacombe Lucien*, superior in every way to *The Last Metro*, had dealt openly with the case of a young French collaborator, and his *Le Feu Follet* (translated in the U.S. as "The Fire Within" but which actually means "Will o' the Wisp") was an adaptation of the famous novel by Drieu la Rochelle, France's most celebrated literary Nazi, who committed suicide as the Allied armies approached Paris in 1944. But perhaps Malle's expatriation to America, and his recent marriage to Candice Bergen, are statements in themselves.

An even more curious case is that of Constantin Costa-Gavras (*Z, The Confession, State of Siege*), the French Left's most accomplished and effective maker of didactic political melodramas. His latest film, *Clair de Femme*, a success of late 1979 in France, turns completely away from politics. A faithful adaptation of a love story, with pretensions, by the late Romain Gary, it is a kind of *Magnificent Obsession* or *Dark Victory*, in which those who suffer (Yves Montand and Romy Schneider) find solace, and perhaps even salvation, in love.

Meanwhile, Claude Sautet, who up until now had been the king of this kind of higher soap opera in French cinema, has produced a far better film of the genre in *Un Mauvais Fils*, a story of reconciliation between son and father. Worth mentioning too as a *frisson* of the 1980 fall season was *Loulou* by Maurice Pialet, another talented director who has never aspired to making political statements. A slice-of-life film of peculiar veracity of feeling, it demonstrates the disruptive power of female sexual avidity—a classic French theme and certainly socially conservative, but not perceived as such by audiences, or perhaps even by the director. Claude Lelouch (*A Man and a Woman*), for his part, is working on a huge, quadri-national, generational chronicle inspired by his love of music.

So, among the historic leaders of contemporary French cinema, one has fled into an artificial past, one into pop-zoology, one into soap opera, and one has simply fled to America. Others have continued to make the non-political films they have always made. Only François Truffaut, probably France's best known film-maker abroad, has touched on political questions, producing to great public acclaim a movie which leaves audiences with the feeling that, under the Nazi Occupation, their country lived through an hour which if not absolutely its finest was still passably fine. Oddly, perhaps puffed up with his new position as a custodian of France's historical greatness, Truffaut has just committed what as far as I know is the first openly political action of his entire life by signing a statement in support of Poland's Solidarity group. But I should point out that in this gesture he does not differ in any important respect from the attitude of the French government (or indeed that of the United States) insofar as he would be unlikely to favor any military defense of the Poles if they were to stand their ground and fight.

It seems unfair to turn a man's noble words against him in this way, but the whole affair is very strange. Truffaut, who remained totally silent on the Algerian war, the Vietnam war, the Hungarian

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rising, the Prague Spring and later Soviet invasion; on repressive societies ranging from China of the Cultural Revolution to Latin America; on Solzhenitsyn, on Sakharov; on the violent antagonism in the Middle East (although his children are half-Jewish); and even on the violent turmoil in his own country in 1968 is now, amazingly, waving the banner of Lech Walesa. My unprovable suspicion is that, inspired by the pieties of his own *The Last Metro*, he is expressing its wishful underlying thesis that autocracies can never extinguish the spark of freedom in the human spirit, or some such Bastille Day sentiment, and that by extension the Soviet Union, with all its tanks and nuclear missiles, cannot hold in check the thirst for liberty of a free people aroused. But, this being Truffaut, you can never be certain he isn't drawing his inspiration from Cornell Wilde's Chopin in *A Song to Remember*.

BUT what of the last of the Founding Fathers of the *Nouvelle Vague*, Jean-Luc Godard—the only one to have naively mistaken the group for a politically revolutionary movement? To give a feeling for Godard's personality I will only recall that when he gave up the cinema a decade ago after *Tout Va Bien* (starring Jane Fonda), he declared that he would not return until the Palestinians had marched in triumph into Jerusalem. The way ahead for the cinema, he also said, would be for *everyone* to make films and send them to friends like letters. I offer this as evidence of Godard's sense of the achievable.

To understand Godard's latest film, it helps to bear in mind that a major turning point in the history of the French Left occurred in the weeks preceding the general legislative elections of 1978. France's Socialist and Communist parties, having come together in a laboriously wrought common front for the presidential election four years before (which they of course lost), suddenly fell out with a vengeance. Communist attacks on the Socialists became more and more violent and it became obvious that, for as far ahead as could be seen in this heavily ideological country, the Left had no chance whatever of coming to power. For many months there was a pretended mystery about the Communist-Socialist break, but it wasn't long before skeptics were suggesting that since President Giscard d'Estaing had moved sharply away from the "Atlantic" spirit with which he entered office, Moscow had no desire at all to see him defeated. And now even François Mitterrand, head of the French Socialist party, has stridently declared that the Communists and Giscard d'Estaing are *copains comme cochons*, literally "pally like pigs"—a far more insulting version of "thick as thieves."

For those French sympathizers of the Soviet Union prepared to bide their time, the prospect of France gradually becoming ever more accommodating toward the USSR, and ever more detached from the West, could be quietly gratifying. But for someone of the rabid revolutionary temperament of Godard, who craved, as it were, to see the tumbrils roll, the knowledge that in the foreseeable future he could not possibly hope to witness a "real" revolution in France might have been a great disillusionment. Whatever the cause, his *Sauve Qui Peut (La Vie)* is a work of consuming bitterness and despair.

Once more the title calls for explanation. *Sauve Qui Peut* (literally "Let him save himself who can") is the standard French expression for "Every man for himself." The addition of *La Vie* in parentheses emphasizes, in case there could be any doubt, that what is at stake when every man is for himself is survival. Hence: The ship is going down. We are in the last desperate scramble. There is no longer any hope of saving (establishing) the good, humane, just society, and now even the life of each individual wretch is at stake.

THE film takes place in Godard's native Switzerland. Paul Godard (the real name of the director's father) is a Swiss bourgeois, who works for Swiss television. His girlfriend, Denise Rimbaud (Natalie Baye), leaves him to milk cows and ride her bicycle in the country. But Paul (Jacques Dutronc) cannot bring himself to leave the city (apparently shot in Geneva but intended to be Anywhere, Western Europe). He has a summary, colorless encounter with a prostitute, Isabelle (Isabelle Huppert), who, the reverse of Paul's girlfriend, has left the country to advance herself in the big town. Paul has two cool, restaurant meetings with his ex-wife and thirteen-year-old daughter, who wears a Palestinian *kefiya* as a neck scarf and, judging by the way she stares at her father balefully, hates him quite a lot. Paul's character is not elaborated. Things happen to him. He is passive. At the end of the last, uneventful, meeting with his wife and daughter, Paul inadvertently steps in front of an automobile and is killed. This is the end of the picture.

The only other character whose story we follow to any degree is Isabelle the prostitute, who, revealing the great secret of the profession of selling one's body to the vile middle class, tells her younger sister, "All they really want is to humiliate you" (although this was certainly not the case with Paul). We are shown a couple of highly stylized (and unerotic) scenes of prostitution in which humiliation by monstrous bourgeois could arguably be claimed to be the point, although Isabelle does not seem to be on a much higher moral level herself. When her sister aspires to follow in her footsteps Isabelle demands 50 percent of her take.

Although Truffaut has not progressed a jot in the cinema art since his quite simple beginnings, and is still totally incapable of producing the dazzling effects of the great virtuoso directors, Godard over the years has acquired considerable technique, and *Every Man for Himself*, as the film is called in English, is a steady barrage of freeze frames, staccato cutting, and projected mental images, going both forward and backward in time—to the point where it appears that Godard is using the technical tricks to cloak a very thin story.

But the film's most revealing ele-

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ment is Paul's memory-relationship to the revolutionary or radical Left icons of the 60's. For no apparent reason he suddenly says with great disillusionment to his daughter's gym teacher, "Look at Castro. Now all he can do is complain that those dumb Cubans don't work as hard as Americans." Later we hear the voice off camera of Isabelle the prostitute saying, as if to explain why Paul is such a wreck, "Look at his heroes. Castro, Malcolm X, Angela Davis, Herbert Marcuse. . . . .All losers." She later returns to Castro to vilify the Cubans further, unquestionably reflecting Godard's own disappointment at what his former hero has become. "Washington and Moscow have gotten together to keep Castro going, but if he gets into real trouble, he won't have a pot to piss in." This is obviously Godard's own view of, first, the high hopes and, then, the miserable achievement of Fidel Castro.

Even passing over the notion that Washington has actively conspired to prop up Castro—which might come as a surprise to Frank Church and even George McGovern—Paul and the film's director find it unbearable that the Castro regime should depend in any way on the Soviet Union: Castro should presumably be free like a giant condor to sweep and wheel above the mountains and seas of Latin America, filling the heavens with the beating of his wings! A world in which Cuba depends on Soviet subsidies is a world in which Paul Godard—and possibly Jean-Luc Godard—cannot live. The film, in short, is a work of black despair produced by the failure of the 60's to deliver the millennium.

WHAT *Every Man for Himself* is clearly saying is that in the miserable, soulless world in which we live only the despicable *grande bourgeoisie* and its prostitutes can survive, with perhaps a few marginal types in the nooks and crannies. The film has been praised to the skies by about every critic in France, only a minority of them seeming to catch a note of pessimism. Those who did attributed Godard's gloominess, variously, to a true analysis of the rotten society in which we live (these tended to refer to Godard's "intransigent moralism"), to Godard's near-death in a motorcycle accident a few years ago (his mother had died in an automobile crash in 1954), or to a wonderful quality he had of "pure" despair. With some adjustments, I reject none of these explanations out of hand as explanations of Godard's personal morbidity, but his film plainly presents despair as a consequence of the disappointed hopes of the 60's.

A subsidiary interpretation of *Every Man for Himself* is that women are stronger and less scrupulous (or perhaps less finicky) than men. In fact the film devotes so much time to Isabelle's power of survival, with such strong emphasis on her inner spirit being untouched (mental projections of serene lakeside sunsets) while she rents her body to the contemptible bourgeois, that one begins to think that perhaps this is the Way Ahead: we should all rent out our bodies while preserving the sanctity of our inner selves. Of the other women in the film, Paul's ex-girlfriend is possibly happy with her cows and bicycle in the country (although Godard's assigning her the name Rimbaud—the great runaway—cannot be without meaning), while his young daughter in her Palestinian scarf might even be the hope of the future (no girl who loves the PLO and hates her dad can be all bad). For Paul, in any case, there is no future. He is run over and killed by a car in which our new prostitute, Isabelle's younger sister, is riding. As he lies dying on the street his ex-wife and daughter walk off coldly, the ex-wife saying, "Let's go. It's no concern of ours."

Strong, callous, unprincipled women are a consistent element of Godard's work. His very first film, *Une Femme Coquette*, in 16 mm, is the story of blithe deception by a woman. In *Breathless*, Patricia (Jean Seberg) betrays Michel (Jean-Paul Belmondo) to the police, who gun him down in the street. In *Pierrot le Fou* Pierrot (Belmondo) is driven to suicide by a conscienceless woman. In a host of Godard's other movies, women scorn, harry, bully, abuse, and betray men, while Godard's attitude remains ambivalent. Does he admire or fear these women? It is entertaining to think that a hundred years ago in France, Godard might well have joined Alexandre Dumas *fils*, Emile Augier, and the other "masculinists" (as they were called at the time) who issued dire warnings of what mischief women would cause if, given too much freedom, they were turned loose on society. But the lines are drawn differently today. Instead of being a bitter, defeated masculinist Godard is a bitter, defeated revolutionary.

As I have said, Godard and Truffaut are no longer on the best of terms. Godard has said contemptuously of his former comrade in arms, "Truffaut never made a good film in his life," and "Now he's a court cinéaste." Truffaut has answered by accusing Godard of jealousy. Godard, too, has now fled France and is living in his Protestant Switzerland, where in a bizarre turn of events there is now more street radicalism than there is in Paris. He has accepted two new assignments: to serve as a television consultant to the government of Mozambique, and to shoot, perhaps on videotape, a script which in a novel procedure will allegedly be used as the basis of casting and financing for Francis Coppola's projected *Bugsy Siegel*. Jean-Luc Godard has accepted employment as Francis Coppola's cinematographic advance man.

IT IS a curious paradox in France that the voices that have fallen politically silent are among those that were once the most shrilly anti-capitalist, anti-bourgeois, and anti-American—exactly the voices one might have expected to hear raised, at least if one were to draw a parallel with France of the 30's, when the drumfire of attacks by the French far Right against the corruption and decadence of the Republic (called *la gueuse*, "the slut") never let up. But if there are strong parallels between the appeasers' and collaborationists' France of four decades ago and the self-Finlandized France of today (*Die for Danzig? Die for Afghanistan?*),

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there are notable differences as well. The decline of radical, anti-establishment films is evident everywhere, but it is only part of the precipitous decline in enthusiasm for radical change throughout the entire French Left: among the intellectuals, at the universities, in the labor movement. The ardor of French intellectuals for Marxism has wilted pathetically. Some of this has quite likely been the result of the Communist-Socialist split, but one suspects that something even more profound is involved. It might well be that many of these anti-capitalist zealots were the offspring of liberal pathology, engaged in political theater and psychodramas, and now that a cold wind is blowing from the East and they feel the chill in their bones they realize that they never really wanted their country to follow the Soviet road after all. Whatever the cause, the piercing anti-Western voices in the cinema are silent.

The stunning exception to my general picture of evasion and silence and hollow reassurance in the French cinema is, of course, Godard. Frustrated utopian radical though he may be, he is more honest and forthright than the other ideologues. Godard has looked down the long road into the future and seen that the world he dreamed of and called forth so passionately cannot be. He has said so as plainly as he can in his latest movie. Asked where he stands now he answers wryly, with some modesty, *"Je cherche un metier"* ("I'm looking for a profession"). There is a certain irony in the answer, but there it is. Jean-Luc Godard has come to the end of the line. He is drifting, has lost his hope of influencing events. Whatever happens now, he's out of it.

An interesting view on the Godard film was expressed to me recently by a high French government official, who felt the movie wasn't really pessimistic at all and suggested an alternate, "poetic" reading of the title as *Qui Peut Sauver Sa Vie*, "(He) Who Can Save His Own Life." He saw the film as a kind of survival manual. "You can't be passive like Paul," he said. "You must be active like Isabelle (the prostitute)." I had found a certain strain of this in the movie but pointed out that it meant Godard's formula for survival was to prostitute yourself to the powerful. "But she knows how to preserve her inner sense of worth!" the official objected, at which I was glad to modify the survival formula to: "How to prostitute yourself to the powerful while preserving your inner sense of worth." Feeling I was addressing myself more to the official's views than to those of Godard, I offered an even clearer formulation: "It is better to live on your knees than die on your feet." This ended the conversation.

Fiction

Games Writers Play

Pearl K. Bell

IRIS MURDOCH has for many years been considered one of the major women novelists in the English-speaking world, along with Doris Lessing and, in the younger generation, Margaret Drabble. Her weighty reputation has been nourished by the fact that Miss Murdoch is a professional intellectual, a former philosophy don at Oxford who has written highly respected books on Sartre and on aesthetics. But primarily she is a prolific novelist, endowed with extraordinary energy and confidence, who has written twenty novels in the last twenty-six years. Inevitably, her earlier vocation of philosopher has led critics to label her an existential novelist, a transcendental realist, and a moral logician whose fiction is subtly indebted to Wittgenstein, Sartre, and Simone Weil. But none of these rubrics succeeds in placing Iris Murdoch within the multifarious world of the novel.

There are, among traditional novelists—and Miss Murdoch is assuredly traditional—four kinds of writers. One is the natural storyteller, including writers as dissimilar as Sir Walter Scott and Rudyard Kipling, whose sense of the dynamics of narrative is inborn and unlearnable, like a talent for music. But Miss Murdoch does not have that natural skill; her plots are generally effortful and contrived. Then there are the reflec-

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tive novelists, like Tolstoy and Thomas Mann, whose large philosophical and panoramic books are conceived under the mythic spell of history. Though Miss Murdoch is a philosopher, she is curiously uninterested in sweeping historical or cultural themes (only one of her novels, *The Red and the Green*, dealing with the Irish rebellion, is set in the past, but it conveys little feeling for the political atmosphere of the Troubles); nor does she make any effort to dramatize abstract ideas in her fiction. She surely does not belong among the novelists who are enthralled by larger-than-life characters and the comic power of the grotesque, such as Dickens and Saul Bellow, and whose creatures, once they invade the reader's imagination, are etched in his memory forever. Though Miss Murdoch is intrigued by character, few of her invented men and women are so distinct and uniquely drawn that they remain in the mind after the novel has ended.

What kind of novelist is she? A gamester more than anything else. She is one of that peculiarly British (and Irish) breed of writers who confront the elements of fiction as the stuff of a diverting contest, and view their characters not as persons rooted in a recognizable world but as chessmen on the great board of life. Such game-playing novelists often write brittle comedies that focus upon narrow areas of experience in which the human tokens can be manipulated with exhilarating ingenuity and detachment without defying the confines of the game —or becoming too seriously involved in its potentially sober actuality. There was a good deal of the gamester in the young Evelyn Waugh, and one of the myriad selves of the English-educated Nabokov was a master of such fictional revels. But it is hard to think of another novelist who has been as indefatigably willing as Iris Murdoch to play the same game, make the same moves, with remarkably few variations and an astonishing immunity to boredom, year after year in one fat novel after another.

Miss Murdoch's convoluted plots are marvels of intricacy and accident, full of tempestuous adultery, sexual quadrilles, sudden death, destructive infatuations, nasty conspiracies, and poisonous jealousy. But they usually bear little resemblance to what we already know about the convulsions of human experience, and our engagement with this rackety maelstrom rarely goes beyond the level of mischievous amusement. Neither the victims nor the survivors, the winners nor the losers, can arouse a strongly felt response. We are always too aware of Miss Murdoch's crafty maneuvers, her coolly inventive dispassion. What is particularly ironic about Iris Murdoch the "philosophical novelist" is that her novels seem so willfully unreflective and devoid of ethical and metaphysical scrupulousness. We have busy-ness and a prankish preoccupation with musical beds, tireless dashing from place to place, eruptions of passion and treachery in the unlikeliest hearts at the oddest moments, but none of the commotion adds up to a comprehensible grasp of the power of unreason and the workings of fate.

It hardly needs saying that the irrational and the demonic play a vital role in many novelists' visions of the way of the world; but these violations of order must be plausible in order to win the reader's acquiescence. Miss Murdoch scorns this tiresome necessity, and prefers to play the game her way. A particularly flagrant example of this indifference to plausibility occurs in her 1978 novel, *The Sea, the Sea*. An urbane and worldly-wise theater director, Charles Arrowby, retires to an isolated village to write his memoirs and woo the consolations of solitude. But when he discovers that the great love of his youth, who jilted him forty years before and is now an old, dumpy, dreary housewife, lives in the same village, he tries to steal her away from her husband in a campaign of lunatic cunning. Of course he is the prisoner of a vanished dream. What we want to know is why, but Miss Murdoch does not even raise the question, providing minutely detailed accounts of Arrowby's antic machinations instead of making his madness believable.

The word "love" is the rhetorical keystone in Iris Murdoch's novels, but it is hard to derive any clear idea of its meaning, beyond the fact that those who are by love possessed are electrified with an energy they did not know they had. Sometimes love is cruel, more often it is absurd, but the only Murdoch novel in which this alien force acquires hard precision is *A Severed Head* (1961), which reveals a gift for straightforward, unpretentious sexual farce that she has unfortunately allowed to atrophy in favor of sentimentality.

IN HER new novel, *Nuns and Soldiers*,* all the familiar Murdoch types are once again assembled for the pleasures of the game: the dying saint, the gossiping birds of prey, the rejected lovers, the failed mystic, the charming good-for-nothing, and so on. Most of the characters are linked by marriage or friendship to a large Anglo-Jewish banking family, the Openshaws ("perhaps originally Oppenheims or some such"), many of whom converted to Christianity long ago but still think of themselves, we are told, as vaguely but essentially Jewish. Why this is so is never clarified, nor does Miss Murdoch seem to find it in any way remarkable that the several rabbis in the family, along with those Openshaws who still live as Jews, are imperturbably tolerant of their apostate cousins. Predictably, Miss Murdoch is far less intrigued by the social and psychological nuances of Anglo-Jewish assimilation than she is by the dance of love and the dance of death.

Guy Openshaw, a saintlike man of honor, is dying of cancer in early middle age, and his friends and cousins gather round to pay homage and to ease the strain on his wife, Gertrude. One of the faithful company is a Pole, called the Count because pronouncing his name gives his English friends lockjaw, who has been an outsider in Britain since his wartime childhood, and is much given to brooding on Polish history. In a recurrent nightmare, the Count,

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whose father was a vicious anti-Semite, becomes a Jew in the Warsaw Ghetto who will eventually perish in Treblinka. This should come as a welcome relief from Miss Murdoch's customary indifference to history, but the Count's Polish despair is given far less prominence than his secret and hopeless love for Gertrude. When, after Guy's death, she impulsively marries Tim, a scrounging, deceitful, untalented young painter, the Count contemplates suicide. Meanwhile Gertrude's friend Anne, a former nun, is hopelessly in love with the Count, while Guy's cousin Manfred falls hopelessly in love with Anne. Everyone talks a lot about the nobility of suffering and self-sacrifice, and in the end Gertrude and Tim, who have had their troubles, are blissfully reunited by the sweet balm of Eros, while the others make a separate peace with their unrequited longing.

IT IS true that such a quick synopsis makes the plot of *Nuns and Soldiers* sound preposterous, but it *is* preposterous. The characters are so inchoate and inadequately realized that they cannot sustain the burden of passion Miss Murdoch imposes on them. Love, constantly asserted, discussed at tedious length, remains a vague and sentimental abstraction. All these throbbing hearts belong not to human beings but to pawns on a sexual chess-board. And if we cannot believe in a novelist's characters, how can we hope to credit her definition of love?

Miss Murdoch slyly opens *Nuns and Soldiers* with the name "Wittgenstein," uttered by the dying Guy Openshaw, who then impatiently dismisses the thinker he had long admired as "a sort of amateur, really." But the invocation of the philosopher's name suggests the key to the novelist's design. The later Wittgenstein repudiated his former belief that words can correspond directly to objects, and came to the position that all of language is a game in which the rules of meaning vary in accordance with the kind of game one is playing. In adapting this notion to the game of literary fiction, Iris Murdoch keeps her cool, ironic distance from the importunate pressures of thought and feeling. Though she is called a philosophical novelist, it is difficult to get any idea from her novels of what she thinks about contemporary culture, society, politics, what judgments she has arrived at about the issues that confront us all. Even when, as in *The Bell* (1958), Miss Murdoch has dealt with such a sober subject as the disintegration of an idealistic religious community, the moral direction of the story remains hidden. Perhaps this adroit evasion of accessible meaning, the refusal to provide any hint of commitment, explains why she has been able to turn out a book a year with such indefatigable ease. When a novelist prefers the moves of the game to its more demanding and unplayful consequences, it is not hard to be prolific.

BUT even Iris Murdoch's prodigious energy pales beside that perpetual word-processor, Anthony Burgess. A late bloomer, he did not devote himself entirely to writing until he left the British colonial service in his forties, but in the following two decades he has made up for lost time. His twenty-odd volumes of fiction range over vast immensities of time and space, and are full of flashy erudition and restless experiments with language and form.

In one of his early novels, *The Right to an Answer* (1960), Burgess proved himself a mordantly funny satirist, expert at the outraged snarl against society that has been a staple of postwar British fiction and that reached comic perfection in the work of Kingsley Amis. In *Devil of a State* and the trilogy, *The Long Day Wanes,* drawing upon his colonial years in Malaya, Burgess was a canny and unsentimental chronicler of the death rattle of empire, perceiving it as a tragicomedy of misconception and fatally crossed wires between incongruent races and cultures. But in his later work it has become clear that his unique brilliance lies not in the fields that Evelyn Waugh, E. M. Forster, and Graham Greene have already plowed, but in his Joycean obsession with language. Joyce, indeed, is the taunting ghost that looms behind Burgess, as Wittgenstein hovers over Iris Murdoch. Not only has Burgess written several studies of Joyce, but he has also published a shortened version of *Finnegans Wake* and has been working for years on the quixotic dream of translating the book into Italian, one of some half-dozen languages he speaks with acrobatic fluency.

WHERE Joyce sought to compress the whole of European civilization into a single moment of historical time, Burgess deployed his erudite fascination with language in a futuristic morality tale. *A Clockwork Orange* is Burgess's masterpiece, a savage prophecy of a future socialist England in which teenage gangs called Nadsats roam the streets in an ecstasy of mindless violence. The novelty of the book consists in an invented language, the Russified slang that is the hoodlums' secret code. Its unintelligibility to others is an emblem of the gangs' sinister power over the *poogly chellovecks* (frightened persons) and *grazhny bratchnies* (dirty bastards) they terrorize. The astonishing feat of *A Clockwork Orange* is the way the seeming gibberish quickly yields its meaning within the context of the gang leader's monologue.

In his account of the Pavlovian conditioning which the state employs to transform the vicious Alex into a docile citizen, Burgess sought to press home his certainty that man, however depraved, must be free to make a moral choice between good and evil. Deeply suspicious, as he once remarked, of "any political ideology which rejects original sin and believes in moral progress," Burgess in *A Clockwork Orange* turned the liberal piety of the welfare state on its head, repudiating the simple-minded faith of our age in rehabilitation and social conditioning. More recently Burgess spelled out the point once again in *1985*, a rather cranky attempt to bring Orwell's dystopia up to date: "I recognize that the desire to cherish man's unregenerate nature, to deny

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the possibility of progress and reject the engines of enforced improvement, is very reactionary, but, in the absence of a new philosophy of man, I must cling to whatever I already have."

What Burgess is saying—that moral reform cannot be induced—is presumably indisputable. Yet his implication that the evil of violence, freely chosen, is preferable to the brainwashed passivity of "reconditioned" sinners shrinks the actual human alternatives with ludicrous severity. Any absolute principle, no matter how uncompromisingly it declares itself for moral freedom, becomes twisted in its absolute application. And the lesson of the last thirty years, the lesson that makes a tragedy of the Enlightenment, is that even when virtues are positive they may prove to be irreconcilable. As a thinker Burgess is considerably less persuasive than as a virtuoso of language.

IT IS not immediately clear as one reads Anthony Burgess's fitfully entertaining new novel, *Earthly Powers*,* whether he conceived it as his magnum opus or as an eccentric attempt to write a best-seller. On the one hand it draws heavily upon his versatility as scholar, linguist, Christian-humanist sage, and satirist. On the other hand it displays with gaudy largesse a talent for the kind of blockbusting fantasy that relies on sensational coincidence, extravagantly unbelievable characters, and exotic locales.

It has never been possible to guess what Burgess might tackle next—his recent novels have dealt with Napoleon, Keats, Orwell, Jesus, and a pornographic movie "based on" Gerard Manley Hopkins's "The Wreck of the Deutschland"—but the imagined autobiography of a popular writer modeled on Somerset Maugham is the last thing one would have expected him to attempt. Why Maugham? For one flippant reason, because he provides Burgess with a socko opener: "It was the afternoon of my eighty-first birthday and I was in bed with my catamite when Ali announced that the Archbishop had come to see me." For another, because a protagonist who roams the world in search of plots and settings enables Burgess, too, to put to practical use all the strange countries he has lived in. Finally, the history of Kenneth Toomey, rich and world-famous homosexual writer of fluffy novels and plays, allows Burgess to haul in a glittering catch of actual stars whom his peripatetic celebrity would have known in the course of a long and adventurous life: Henry James and E.M. Forster, Havelock Ellis and "Jim" Joyce, Wyndham Lewis and "Ruddy" Kipling, Ernest Hemingway and Rainer Maria Rilke, who "cried in my presence in a low beershop in Trieste."

AS THE dust-jacket serenely boasts, *Earthly Powers* "includes everyone of fame and distinction in the social, literary, and political life of two continents," but this is just the icing on the cake. For Burgess also appears to have more serious matters in mind in recounting the saga of Kenneth Toomey. In his youth, the fledgling novelist by chance encounters an earthy priest, Carlo Campanati, and as their lives become deeply intertwined over the next fifty years, the improbable friends find themselves increasingly at odds about the nature of the human soul. For Toomey, the cynical novelist, the horrors of 20th-century history continually reinforce his inherent certainty of man's irredeemable depravity, while the peasant-priest's faith in essential human goodness remains unshaken through two wars, Nazi barbarism, and betrayal by his own family. Evil, he declares, is the work of the Devil and external to man. Eventually Campanati ascends to the throne of St. Peter (the resemblance to Pope John XXIII is not coincidental) and is canonized soon after his death.

The awesome philosophical differences represented by Toomey and Campanati account for only a single layer of the story. Burgess seems to have been determined to omit no important moment of this malignant century; at every turn of the historical wheel, there is Kenneth Toomey, on the scene and bearing witness. In the 20's he can tell us all about Prohibition gang wars in America and the rise of fascism in Italy. A decade later he is at a Nazi film festival in Berlin, where he inadvertently saves Himmler from an assassin's bullet, and a few years after that we find him sneaking into Austria in a doomed effort to save a Jewish Nobel laureate. In 1945, who but Kenneth Toomey is sent by Churchill to Germany to write a book about the Nazi death camps? As an old man he tries to rescue a great-niece from the clutches of a Jonestown-like cult.

After a while it begins to look as though Burgess set out to write a tongue-in-cheek version of Upton Sinclair's Lanny Budd and Herman Wouk's Pug Henry, both of whom Toomey must have run across on those well-worn trails of history. Indeed, the further Burgess moves from the image of Somerset Maugham, the more suspect his panorama of history comes to seem. But Burgess is a witty fellow, and to leaven the heavy dose of historical drama, he has a wonderfully funny time with the campy malice of Toomey's dreadful catamites, one of them a black poet who runs off to serve a ruthless African dictator, becomes fed up with his "roots," and migrates back to New York to teach Black Studies at Columbia. With his usual comic agility, Burgess interleaves the decline of the West with brilliant parodies of musical songs, social comedies of the 20's, a homosexual version of the Creation, and the cozy verse of John Betjeman.

WHY, then, since Burgess has provided so many things to contemplate and savor, does this groaning board of a novel finally seem so meager? Why should a work that strikes so many chords of significance sound so tinny? Part of the trouble stems from Burgess's chronic exhibitionism, which he has never been able to control and which is especially obtrusive in *Earthly Powers*, with its solemn air of high seriousness. The swaggering displays of knowledge have no genuine connection with Bur-

* Simon & Schuster, 607 pp., $15.95.

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gess's thought or characters, and soon become merely exasperating. Sitting in a Paris café with Wyndham Lewis and Joyce, Toomey remarks that Joyce "could not see the sudden shaft of levin"—lightning, that is, and a sly wink at Harry Levin, who wrote a fine early study of the Irish novelist. Eliot is ticked off for misconstruing a Tarot card in "The Waste Land" ("A novelist could never get away with that sort of inattention to detail," sniffs Toomey). In the midst of a melancholy death scene, we are instructed that the word "sardonic" means "either grinning like a dog or sour-faced after the eating of an astringent plant of Sardinia, what the art historians call," and so on. And Burgess's addiction to uncommon words in common contexts—anaphebe, infangthief, gaudiated, obliterans—instead of refining his meaning just buries it.

But the heart of the problem with *Earthly Powers* is more complicated than verbal ostentation. Burgess has sought to weave two very different fictions into a cluttered skein. On one level he has, in his odd fashion, written a lurid, amusing, speciously intellectual saga of the man who is there at every right historical moment, and in so doing has squandered his narrative gifts on the tricks of *Ragtime* and Hollywood. Into this hollow frame he has tried to squeeze a Christian meditation on man, God, and the Devil that is dimly reminiscent of Graham Greene but much less affecting, since in Burgess the conflicting views are embodied in such artificially calculated opposites—the homosexual novelist and the priest who becomes Pope. Threaded through both the Hollywood epic and the spurious moral philosophy is the other Burgess tinsel of Joycean puns and coruscating verbal resources. The huge unwieldy structure cannot be taken seriously, though reviewers on both sides of the ocean have done just that. Once again we are made aware that a game, however intricate and dazzling, is still not a novel.

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Books in Review

Speaking for Whitman

WALT WHITMAN: A LIFE. By JUSTIN KAPLAN. *Simon & Schuster. 429 pp. $15.00.*

Reviewed by KENNETH S. LYNN

THE best opportunity a biographer has for appreciating Walt Whitman's unfolding sense of himself lies in the careful examination of his successive revisions of, and additions to, *Leaves of Grass*. The comparative study of texts, however, is not a task that has much appeal to the author of the latest attempt to assess the poet's life, because in Justin Kaplan's view biography is something other than a "historical or scholarly form." Biographers ought to think of themselves, Kaplan recently asserted in *Harvard Magazine*, as creative artists whose work has "a lot in common with the novel," rather than as mere historical observers or literary critics.

Thus in *Walt Whitman: A Life* the various versions of Whitman's poems have not been handled with care, they have been smashed into fragments and distributed through the text as thematic accompaniments to the telling of a highly unhistorical tale. For although Kaplan's book is purportedly the story of a 19th-century writer, its hero has a startlingly modern mind. Particularly in his sexual and political attitudes, Kaplan's Whitman appears to be the product not of a Victorian world, but of the post-World War II period.

"In a way," Kaplan declares in his *Harvard* piece, "you have to speak for Whitman. Though he's a very eloquent fellow, sometimes you've got to give him a voice where he remains silent. You take that liberty. For example, I decided to face the issue of homosexuality in a worldly and sophisticated way. So what if he is homosexual? What is the big news? Where's the scandal? There simply isn't any."

What is most striking about this passage is its lack of perspective. Like many other self-described sophisticates of our time, Kaplan is apparently convinced that he is living in the age of ultimate truths, one of which is that homosexuality is not an illness. So committed is he to the current wisdom that he finds it hard to imagine that any sensitive person could ever have subscribed to a harsher wisdom, particularly not anyone who was the author, as Whitman was, of a series of salutes to the pleasures of male companionship. As a result, Kaplan experiences not a tremor of historical doubt as he takes the liberty of endowing the hero of *Walt Whitman: A Life* with an assumption about the healthiness of homosexual preference that is in reality his own.

THE psychological crisis that unarguably overtook Whitman in 1859, four years after the publication of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the "slough" of melancholy into which he fell, the hours of dread that he endured, had three sources, Kaplan's biography would have us believe. The first was his awareness of being forty years old. As the poet "rounded the potently symbolic turn into his fifth decade, he entered a dark period." What makes this explanation immediately suspect is that Kaplan has a habit of finding psychological significance in birthday anniversaries. But far more damaging to the explanation is the biographer's failure to come up with any evidence in support of it—which is not surprising, because the only explicit response to his fortieth birthday that Whitman ever made was to say to himself in his notebook that the time had come for him "*to stir* . . . and get out of this *Slough*." Far from plunging him into despondency, Whitman's entrance into his fifth decade prompted him to try to surmount his gloomy feelings.

Kaplan also argues that the crisis of 1859 was partially precipitated by the decision of Whitman's beloved brother Jeff to get married. "His cherished and exclusive relationship with Jeff had been fractured. . . . Confronting his bare-stripped heart, the brave and joyous poet yielded to the profoundest melancholy." Once again, alas, resounding words conceal a factual void. In 1890, the aged Whitman recalled that he and Jeff had been "greatly attached to each other till he got married." But there is no indication in this reminiscence, or in any other autobiographical commentary, that at the time of the wedding Whitman's joy in his brother's happiness was shadowed by a sense of loss. As for the woman Jeff married, Whitman was not only not jealous of her, but quickly came to love her as if she were a sister.

Finally, Kaplan associates Whitman's loss of morale in 1859 with the discovery that he was a homosexual. But in keeping with his blasé "Where's the scandal?" attitude, Kaplan downplays the importance of the discovery, first by giving house room to alternative explanations of the poet's despondency (the birthday anniversary and brother Jeff), and second by severely underestimating what Whitman was talking about when he spoke of the "sick, sick" feelings that accompanied his consciousness of the sort of sexual creature he was.

Whitman's special word for his homosexual thoughts was "perturbations," which his biographer takes as a synonym for the mental distresses attendant upon a sexual itch. Kaplan's poet knows the torment of physical longing, the humiliation of undignified pursuit, and the sense of inadequacy that unfulfillment breeds. But he most definitely does not know the agony of guilt or the hell of self-hatred. That "perturbations," in Victorian

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usage, referred not only to the distresses of desire, but to the agitations that were "characteristic of a bad conscience," as Cardinal Newman once put it, is not an etymological lesson one will learn from a biographer who does not like to have his creative artistry constricted by any form of scholarly inquiry.

Kaplan also misses the self-revulsion that is at work in some of the additions to the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. In the mid-1850's, the poet had joyously celebrated bodily contact. "I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning/How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me. . . ." Then suddenly the author of those lines came to perceive himself as a poetic dupe who had utterly failed to understand the significance of what he had been saying. In the poem "As I Ebb'd With the Ocean of Life," first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in April 1860, he confessed how oppressed with himself he felt for having "dared to open my mouth," and how bitter the realization was that "amid all that blab whose echoes recoil upon me/I have not once had the least idea who or what I am. . . ." Only a few years earlier he had looked down into the water and seen the haloed head of a poet-god ("the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape of my head in the sunlit water"); now he gazed again into the watery mirror and saw

> loose windrows, little corpses,
> Froth, snowy white, and bubbles,
> (See, from my dead lips the ooze exuding at last,
> See, the prismatic colors glistening and rolling,)
> Tufts of straw, sands, fragments.

Yet at the same time that Whitman expanded the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* to include a number of poems in which images of vileness loom large, he defiantly added a series of exquisitely tender dramatizations of homosexual love. The pressure of desire as well as the pressure of disgust is felt in the 1860 edition, and the contradiction between them is so intense that one has to wonder whether the bedeviled writer was not headed for collapse.

With the coming of the Civil War, however, Whitman was able to transcend his emotional conflict by assuming the role of a wound dresser to the young men who came to recuperate, or to die, in the military hospitals around Washington, D.C. If he sponged, fed, caressed, and finally bestowed a kiss on a "darling boy" named Lewy that lasted fully half a minute, was he not simply doing his nursely duty? Sexual embraces in a hospital setting were not a sign of sickness, they were a part of the drama of trying to get men well, and in the light of that reassurance Whitman bloomed. "I am running over with health," he exclaimed to a friend in 1863, "fat, red & sunburnt in face &c. I tell thee I am just the one to go [to] our sick boys."

Whitman gained from his wound-dressing experiences the moral stamina to write the poems of despair and hope that he eventually collected in *Drum-Taps* (1865). But with the return of peace his own peace was soon lost. Without the moral sanction that had blessed his encounters with Lewy and other soldiers, a newly cultivated friendship with the Washington streetcar conductor Peter Doyle devolved into an "incessant enormous abnormal perturbation." By 1870, he was desperate. "Depress the adhesive nature," he finally commanded himself in his notebook. "It is in excess—making life a torment . . . diseased feverish disproportionate adhesiveness." Control of his sexual thoughts had become absolutely vital to the sense of personal well-being on which his future career as a poet depended. Yet how could this control be established?

In the only intelligent review of Kaplan's book that I have seen, Marcus Cunliffe complains about its failure to grapple with the great unsolved questions about Whitman's life. One of the questions that Cunliffe cites is, why did Whitman seem to welcome the onset of old age? If Kaplan's treatment of Whitman's homosexual problem had not been so casual, he would have been in a position, it seems to me, to propose a plausible, if admittedly speculative, answer to that conundrum.

Whitman in the early 1870's was a man in his early fifties who looked fifteen to twenty years older. He had reduced the intolerable pressure on his imagination by suddenly turning into an old man. For the Good Gray Poet, grayness was the guarantor of his goodness, or at least of his ability to deny that his relations with young men had ever been anything but fatherly. Thus in 1890, when the English cultural historian John Addington Symonds wrote to him and asked, in curiously urgent tones, whether the poems of male companionship that had first appeared in the 1860 edition of the *Leaves* had not been calculated to "encourage ardent and *physical* intimacies," Whitman was able to disavow the question as "damnable." Vastly disappointed by this reply, Symonds thereafter characterized Whitman as a poet whose feelings were "at least as hostile to sexual inversion as any law-abiding humdrum Anglo-Saxon could desire." No more revealing words have ever been written about Whitman's tortured inner conflict, but Kaplan, unfortunately, does not perceive their importance.

Another question about Whitman's life that still awaits a convincing answer is, how did Walter turn into Walt? What moved a hack journalist of the 1840's, whose principal contribution to American literature had been a fictional confection called *Franklin Evans, or the Inebriate*, to reappear before the reading public in 1855 as a Broadway swaggerer sounding a "barbaric yawp" for all the world to hear? In strictly personal terms, no explanation of this astonishing metamorphosis is possible, because of the paucity of evidence about Whitman's day-to-day development during his chrysalis years. Nevertheless, the question can be dealt with by discussing the political and cultural context within which the transformation took place.

Such a discussion, however, not only does not occur in *Walt Whitman: A Life*, but would be doomed to failure if it did, because of the author's time-bound inability to look at any large event in American history from the point of view of the participants. Thus in

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his prejudged account of Whitman's career as editor of the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* in the 1840's, Kaplan speaks of the *Eagle*'s editorial support of Manifest Destiny and of the conflict with Mexico in the accents of a Vietnam war critic condemning contemporary American "imperialism." "When Polk's war message came over the telegraph from Washington, Whitman, a Democratic regular writing for a Democratic paper in support of a Democratic President, took up the rant of the war party." This knee-jerk sentence betrays not the slightest awareness of why, for instance, the late historian of the American West, Frederick Merk, once called Manifest Destiny the greatest of all the reform movements of the reform-minded 1840's. Like many other youthful idealists of the period, Whitman took up the cause of American expansionism into territories controlled by Mexico because he saw in it the means of renewing the dying Jeffersonian dream of a land-based egalitarianism.

Manifest Destiny also spoke to the cultural anxiety, which Whitman shared with other writers and artists, that American nature, with which they identified all the pioneer virtues of our national life, was being debauched and overwhelmed by the onrush of an artificial civilization. As the late Perry Miller pointed out in his brilliant essay, "The Romantic Dilemma in American Nationalism and the Concept of Nature," the American mind of the 1840's was racked by a "secret hidden horror" that in conquering the wilderness we were not only defacing the land, but destroying our naturalness as a people and becoming like Europeans. Territorial expansion at the expense of Mexico promised to give "Nature's nation" a somewhat longer lease on life. And in the decade following the Mexican war, a handful of writers endeavored to safeguard their society permanently against artificial temptations by supplying it with imaginative examples of an invincible barbarism. The year before Walter Whitman's histrionic debut as Walt, Thoreau recounted the story of his uncluttered life at Walden Pond, and in the very year the Broadway swaggerer sounded his first yawp, Melville pictured John Paul Jones in Paris as an incorrigible barbarian inside one of the citadels of civilization: "Intrepid, unprincipled, reckless, predatory, with boundless ambition, civilized in externals but a savage at heart, America is, or may yet be, the Paul Jones of nations."

Barbarism, as George Santayana knew, is a disease of culture. The poetic identity Whitman seized upon as the promise of America's future was in reality a tribute to its past. In spite of his presentation of himself as the prophet of the people, the people had no interest in repudiating the desirability of wealth, learning, power, and other accouterments of civilization. During Whitman's lifetime, his expressed wish to "turn and live with

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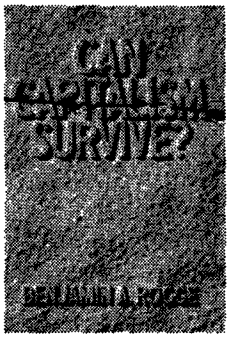

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the animals, they are so placid and self-contained" was either scoffed at or ignored by the general American audience, and in our time he is still regarded as a strange duck among the working-class occupational groups his poetry so picturesquely describes. First and last, the bard of democracy has primarily been the poetic companion of intellectuals.

One Man's Socialism

RADICAL PRINCIPLES: REFLECTIONS OF AN UNRECONSTRUCTED DEMOCRAT. By MICHAEL WALZER. *Basic Books. 310 pp. $15.00.*

Reviewed by MICHAEL NOVAK

THE author of earlier books on the Puritan Revolution, civil disobedience, and war, Michael Walzer has been since 1960 an editor of *Dissent*, where many of the present pieces originally appeared. They are of unusual interest because of the evanescent quality of what Walzer persists in describing as his "socialism." He describes himself variously as on the "near Left," a "democratic socialist," and —in this book's title—a "radical." His favorite enemy appears to be the "neoconservatives." Oddly, while Walzer sometimes tries to show how radical he is—in, perhaps, the left-most 1 percent of the population—at others he portrays himself as part of the political mainstream.

To his Right, Walzer perceives —in the first part of the book—not only the Goldwater of 1964 but also those liberals who cherish the welfare state. His treatment of the New Left, in the essays constituting the second part, seems designed to defend his credentials as a moderate while yet giving gentle approval to the contributions of the New Left to "the Good Old Cause." The three essays in the third section—on modernization, revolution, and the intellectuals—reflect subjects and approaches of hoary socialist tradition. The final four essays seek to gather under the umbrella of socialism such recent passions of the Left as affirmative action for blacks and women.

Walzer owes considerably more to Rousseau and to the syndicalists than to Marx. It might be said that he is the kind of socialist whom Marx abominated, utopian, moralistic, quasi-religious; and that he is the sort of democrat whom Edmund Burke abhorred, vaguely populist while yet most concerned with the intellectual elite—in Walzer's phrase, with "the liberated men and women of our own time." Unlike Burke, Walzer is romantically silent about human untrustworthiness, abuses of power, and popular excesses. His socialism has more to say about style and culture than about institutional checks and balances, political practicality, and economic common sense. He is more likely to quote Walt Whitman than Lenin, and to prefer Marx's visionary humanism to his analysis of power and economic strategy.

ROUSSEAU is the key. Walzer coins the romantic concept of "civism," a quality of virtuous public life which owes nearly everything to Rousseau's attempt to create a new secular religion of political life. Those things which others seek in religion—purpose, transcendence, virtue, ritual, community, liturgy—Walzer seeks in politics. That is about the substance of socialism's appeal for him. His statement of core values is (from a socialist point of view) shockingly bourgeois, yet his socialism provides him with texts and occasions for masking that core with arguments designed to align him with the current demands of left-wing thought, however out of tune these may be not only with Marx but also with the inner conservatism of Rousseau. The tyranny of left-wing fashion upon a strong mind has seldom been more clearly evidenced.

Consider, first, the core. Walzer locates the "deep principles" of the Left in ancient "common convictions" that "were and are part of our cultural heritage." He names these "deep principles" of socialist thought: "individual freedom, hard work, craftsmanship, honesty, and loyalty." Such a list would have been too bourgeois even for Adam Smith, who in *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments* added such—dare one say "socialist"?—values as sympathy, benevolence, fellow feeling, fair play, and the conscience of the impersonal spectator.

To the core, Walzer adds a defense of authority: "The goal of democrats and socialists is to share and to legitimize, but not to abolish authority." In any future socialist order it is "crucial that some men and women be able to exercise authority and that others, despite their new and touchy dignity, be willing to accept it." Next, Walzer adds a defense of private property: "Again, the goal of democrats and socialists is to share and to legitimize, but not to abolish property." His reason for this view, stunning in a socialist, is that "we cannot value work without valuing the values that work produces."

Walzer goes on to attack the centralized, bureaucratic state, both under socialism and under the welfare state. He sounds altogether like a neoconservative, except that he creates a socialist patina: "Political power must always be twice-won. It must be won first with the help of the state . . . against established corporate or local elites. Then it must be won again by new popular forces against the state." His motive for this statement becomes immediately clear, for he adds that women and blacks are still fighting the first battle while others, he hopes, are ready for the second. Socialism "requires insurgency, that is, self-government within the welfare state and against it whenever necessary." Socialism also entails a "great paradox" in the sense that "The state toward which we must always remain tense, watchful, and resistant is or will almost certainly become the most legitimate, rationally purposive, and powerful state that has ever existed." Against this danger, however, Walzer offers little but wishes.

One of Walzer's most bourgeois essays embroiders Oscar Wilde's *mot*: "The trouble with socialism is that it takes too many evenings." This essay, "A Day in the Life of a Socialist Citizen," suggests that Marx was insufficiently socialist in describing a future in which the

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citizen would hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, and play the critic after dinner—the very image of the gentleman farmer. As Walzer observes, Marx left out the vital and all-consuming *political* activities the citizen would be saddled with: the morning meeting of the Council on Animal Life, the special session after lunch of the Fisherman's Council, the late-night meetings of study groups, clubs, editorial boards, and political parties. Blessedly, Walzer would defend the right of the less devout to absent themselves from meetings and to eschew the "*apparatchik* tyranny" of the militants and the activists.

One might conclude, then, that only a residual, inherited piety keeps Walzer in the ranks of socialism. But that would be an error. Socialism still grips him in the iron jaws of coercive state action, most centrally with regard to affirmative action and the distribution of income. His reasoning bends all over itself to come up with quotas which will permit blacks, women, and others to gain those "key entry points to the good life which money affords." And for him, "the present distribution of wealth makes no moral sense."

Walzer's argument for affirmative action and the radical redistribution of income is that all social rewards must be for *intrinsic* reasons, so that money will not be allowed to buy learning, love, political power, or the like. He wishes "*the abolition of the power of money outside its own sphere*" (emphasis his). He dreams of "a society in which wealth is no longer convertible into social goods with which it has no intrinsic connection." He admits that it is impossible to abolish money, but this impossibility he converts into "the strongest possible argument for the radical redistribution of wealth."

Surely, he does not mean to redistribute his own (Walzer writes as though he were one of the poor). So what is he up to? One used to think that democratic socialism represented high and correct ideals; its failures in practice merely propelled one to keep one's faith pure. Then one began to think that democratic socialism was incoherent not only in practice but also in theory. Now, in Walzer, one can see that the errors even of socialist theory are not innocent. For a society which empowers the coercive state to judge the intrinsic moral value of every economic agent makes itself God. How can the state or its agents know? How can they read hearts? Who would trust the state with so much power?

To be sure, persons gifted with extraordinary intellect and capacities for leadership are often born poor. Such talents are often blocked from emergence not simply by poverty but by the envy, rivalry, and resistance of others, by rigid bureaucratic plans, and by cowardice, passivity, or other personal flaws even in the talented themselves. A society which wishes to encourage the flowering of such talent does well, then, to offer incentives *in addition to* the recognition of merit when it appears. Such a society needs fluidity, openness, serendipity. It needs room for the invention of new sources of wealth and new avenues toward power. How would the Jews, Italians, Lebanese, Chinese, and other demonstrably successful groups in America have propelled so many of their young to the top in so short a time except in a fluid and mobile society—and without passing anyone's test of intrinsic moral value? By contrast, the road from utopian socialism to the Ayatollahs, Moral Majorities, and tyrannies of this world—all based upon "intrinsic" moral tests —is a short one.

In thinking about meritocracy, Walzer is surprisingly narrow. He overlooks the genius of the American system, which does not claim that each successful *individual* has greater merit than the next fellow. Its genius lies, rather, in the system as a whole, and in the intergenerational rise and fall of a loose, uncoercive, rough justice. Exactly because money is convertible—the characteristic about which Walzer feigns to be offended—money is subject to foolish uses and to wise.

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Many families who possess wealth for one generation (or more) lose it in the next; new families are constantly acquiring it. Meritocracy claims that for a society as a whole, over time, it is more fair to rely not on intrinsic moral virtue alone but on extrinsic monetary incentives.

This is so for two reasons. First, judgments of intrinsic worth are best left to God, never to the state or its agents. Second, the fluidity of such a meritocratic system is more likely over time to add new reasons for the talented to develop themselves to their utmost, to provide them material means for making their case heard, and to precipitate constantly renewed and unpredictable shifts in social balances of power, as older wealth grows slack and as new social groups arise to seek their day in the sun. Hungry talent is rare enough, and will out.

Democratic socialism, in Walzer's hands, presumes not only to play God but to do so with the coercive power of the state. For what the state wishes to do it will always find reasons. His tortured defense of quotas tangibly corrupts Walzer's own reasoning. Just so, the practice of quotas corrupts all who participate in them. First quotas, later merit, sounds all too much like the original Leninist paradigm: first the dictatorship, then the abolition of the state. First the abolition of money outside its own sphere, then intrinsic virtue. It is easier to believe in Santa Claus. The first moral obligation, Pascal wrote, is to think clearly. Illusions are no sign of moral idealism, only of an odd wish to destroy all that one claims to hold dear.

A Choice of Identity

LEWIS NAMIER AND ZIONISM. By NORMAN ROSE. *Clarendon/Oxford University Press. 182 pp. $29.95.*

Reviewed by JACK N. RAKOVE

PERHAPS the most celebrated *cri de coeur* in modern historical writing occurs in the opening chapter of Lewis Namier's study of *England in the Age of the American Revolution*. In the midst of a paragraph asserting that the relationship of men to land generally determines the history of nations and their politics, one suddenly comes upon this declaration: "Only one nation has survived for two thousand years, though an orphan—my own people, the Jews. But then in the God-given Law we have enshrined the authority of a State, and in the God-promised Land the idea of a Mother-Country. . . . Take away either, and we cease to be a nation; let both live again, and we shall be ourselves once more."

Namier wrote these lines in 1929, when he was preparing to lay aside his historical research in order to assume the political secretaryship of the Zionist Organization. In a life studded with improbabilities, this decision may have been the most surprising. Although his father was descended from no less a figure than the Vilna Gaon, Namier learned of his Jewish ancestry only when he was ten. His parents were highly Polonized, landed Jews who professed a nominal adherence to the church of Rome. Namier never participated in anything even faintly resembling Jewish communal life. Yet while Judaism itself had no appeal for him, he had been drawn to Christianity since boyhood. In 1947, on the eve of his marriage to Julia de Beausobre, a survivor of Stalin's camps and a devout communicant of the Russian Orthodox church, Namier converted. This act shocked his Zionist colleagues, but Namier apparently believed that conversion was as much a fulfillment of Jewish destiny as *aliyah*. Next to these turnings in his life, the fact that a Polish Jew should have become the premier historian of 18th-century England seems barely remarkable.

FEW historians make fit subjects for biography, but Namier, who was also the pioneer of what is now called collective biography (the systematic study of elites), is clearly an exception. Norman Rose's volume adds to an already significant collection of Namieriana. Isaiah Berlin, Jacob L. Talmon, and Arnold Toynbee, among others, published brief memoirs shortly after his death in August 1960, and a full-length biography by Lady Julia Namier appeared a decade ago. Lady Namier reportedly planned a second volume on her husband's complex involvement with the fate of his "co-racials," as he sometimes called them, but before her death in 1977 she passed to Rose the task of writing "a political sketch" of his Zionist activities. Rose has interpreted this charge more faithfully than one might have wished. Still, his book provides a clear and thoughtful account of perhaps the least likely recruit Zionism ever commanded. Like everything else he did, Namier's Zionist activities bore the burden of his eccentricities. Yet in its own way, his commitment speaks to the heart of the dilemma that has confronted the assimilated elites of Western Jewry.

Rose's Namier is preeminently a man acting from political conviction. Two things brought Namier to Zionism, Rose argues. One was his recognition that the political changes sweeping over Eastern Europe after 1919 portended disaster for the concentrations of Jewish population throughout the region. The second was his intense personal attraction to Chaim Weizmann, in whom he found qualities of statesmanship that the "kosher gang" of Zionist functionaries conspicuously lacked. For his part, Weizmann courted Namier because he saw in the historian a powerful intelligence free from dogma and sensitive to the realities of British politics.

The two men collaborated in a number of negotiations with British authorities from 1930 to 1945. As Arab opposition to Jewish settlement in Mandate Palestine grew more cohesive and violent, global security interests led the government to adopt the restrictive policies codified in its May 1939 White Paper. Namier's influence depended on his connection with Weizmann, but these developments undermined his patron's position within the Zionist movement when the conciliatory approach favored by Weizmann produced few dividends.

Always a grim realist (and consistently anti-German), Namier had few illusions about appease-

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ment, the impending calamity of European Jewry, or the shortcomings of Weizmann's diplomacy. Yet the depressing events of these years only led him to plunge more deeply into the cause. In 1939 he became a liaison officer between the Jewish Agency and the various ministries sharing responsibility for Palestine. In fact he was not so much an intermediary as an advocate for Zionist concerns: the plight of refugees, easing of immigration restrictions in Palestine, the creation of Jewish military units, and the political future of postwar Palestine.

BY EMPHASIZING the role Namier played in specific events, Rose clearly establishes the depth of his commitment, but when it comes to explaining the sources of Namier's Zionism or assessing its significance, his account is less satisfactory. Namier was, after all, only a minor actor. What makes him interesting is not so much what he did as what he thought and wrote. These are the aspects of Namier's Zionism that now seem most arresting, but Rose does not accord them the attention they deserve.

Namier's identification with the fate of his "co-racials" reflected condescension as well as conscience. He accepted as valid many of the stereotypes that inform the social dimensions of anti-Semitism. Namier "didn't basically like Jews," his widow once told the journalist Ved Mehta, nor did he admire "what had become of the Jewish character." History had turned the Jew into "a petit bourgeois and a rootless creature; money had taken the place of ties and roots." As Lady Namier would have it (and Rose generally accepts her authority), a mixture of duty and sympathy overcame this intuitive aversion to the Jewish character: "instead of leaving the Jews there," she noted, "he became the most ardent Zionist of his time."

His writings suggest, however, that Namier regarded his own overbearing personality as an example of the defects of the Jewish character. A description of the modern assimilating Jew in a 1941 essay reads like a virtual self-portrait: "He is too eager to please, too affable, too intimate; too intent and emphatic; he shows off and talks too much—in short, he is self-conscious and embarrassed, and his company becomes exhausting." Moodily, perhaps neurotically introspective, Namier was sensitive to this issue because he knew it was his assertive, overwhelming manner that precluded the appointment he coveted at Oxford.

Nor did Namier exclude his own situation from the ambiguities accompanying Jewish success in business and the professions. In another essay he had seized upon the image of the *Luftmensch*—a man living in the air, on air, spouting airy notions and plans—to epitomize the rootless, precarious, and fantastic quality of modern Jewish life. What he called "the *Luftmensch* tragedy of us all" surpassed the plight of the "unemployables" of Eastern Europe. Again, it is difficult to ignore a personal reference in his statement that it was "[our] anomalous position which has made so many of us into traders or into 'intellectuals' (another kind of *Luftmenschen*)." Perhaps this explains his dismissal of Karl Marx as "a typical Jewish half-charlatan who got hold of quite a good idea and then ran it to death just to spite the Gentiles."

NAMIER supported the Zionist movement because it promised to alleviate the deteriorating situation of East European Jewry; but his own Zionism was a response to the moral embarrassment he attributed to the assimilating Jews of the West. The establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine would resolve their dilemma in either of two ways. If the Jews' anomalous status as a people without a nation were removed, those who wished to maintain their identity would be free to act normally, "to be no longer either 'prodigies' or outcasts," even to "become altogether humdrum and mundane." On the other hand, those who wished to assimilate fully would be able to do

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so from a position of moral responsibility rather than as "a confession of inferiority."

It was this second alternative, of course, that Namier ultimately chose for himself. Having consulted more psychoanalysts than he could probably remember, Namier must have believed that his own character was incurably fixed. Resettlement in Israel, as he repeatedly reminded Weizmann, was not for him. After identifying fully and self-consciously with his people during his Zionist years, Namier felt free to proceed with the religious conversion he may have been contemplating for some time.

More than a generation later, the limitations of Namier's analysis seem apparent. The establishment of the state of Israel and the continuing need to defend its legitimacy have obviously affected the self-perceptions of millions of Jews content to remain in exile. But the fulfillment of the Zionist dream has at best only partly resolved the anomalous status and ambivalent attitude that are inherent in an existence governed by conflicting pressures toward identification and assimilation. Moreover, the solution that Namier chose for himself is adequate for individuals only. Those who decide to assimilate fully solve their own Jewish problems—at what cost, we can only guess—but not the problem itself.

Was Namier's choice indeed effective? There is no doubt that conversion and his subsequent marriage gave this troubled man a measure of stability and happiness he had never enjoyed. Namier remained a supporter of Israel, but his active involvement in Zionism was over. Lady Namier's account of his last visit to Israel in 1958 suggests that he had placed considerable emotional distance between himself and his chosen people. The key incident she relates finds Namier gazing out over the Sea of Galilee. "Of course he walked on these waters," Namier murmured. "Could again." As for Israel itself, Lady Namier intimates that its "Arabization," its transformation into an "Oriental" country, took him aback. The new Israelis "were not the people he had sacrificed so much to; and his distress for every one of them was over."

Perhaps it actually was. Yet one wonders whether Namier ever entirely stilled his own unsettled feelings about his identity. Lady Namier's prosaic description of the lecture he gave at Hebrew University on this same trip omits mentioning the moving scene first recorded by Jacob Talmon in these pages some years ago* and now evoked by Norman Rose in the concluding paragraph of his book. Before a packed hall, "Lewis Namier rose to his feet. His voice trembled and tears rolled down his cheeks as he began with the Hebrew: 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.'" Rose concludes that "there could be no more fitting epitaph for this turbulent Zionist," but one cannot avoid wondering whether these lines from the Psalms did not also strike a confessional note.

YET if Jerusalem in fact could never be Namier's chief joy, remembering is the essence of the historian's activity. Watching him that day, Talmon recalled, "One felt an intimation of the tremendous seriousness of the historian's quest"—and, one wants to add, of the historian's need to be honest about himself as well as the sources with which he works. In the end, it is the honesty of Namier's commitment to Zionism, so clearly portrayed in Rose's account, that seems most striking. He rejected the false compromises that life in exile demanded of the modern Jew, insisting in effect that the alternatives of identification and assimilation had to be confronted in a rigorous and morally respectable way. In the 1930's, his analysis of the dismal situation of the Jews required a professional choice that he pursued at a severe cost to his own career. Later, his growing knowledge of himself led him to a religious choice that others would have avoided from sheer embarrassment. In both cases he acted with an honesty that few of us can achieve.

* "The Ordeal of Sir Lewis Namier: The Man, The Historian, The Jew," March 1962.

Workers' Paradise?

ECONOMIC WELFARE IN THE SOVIET UNION. By ALASTAIR MCAULEY. *University of Wisconsin Press. 389 pp. $25.00.*

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY IN THE SOVIET UNION. By MURRAY YANOWITCH. *M. E. Sharpe. 197 pp. $6.95.*

PRIVILEGE IN THE SOVIET UNION. By MERVYN MATTHEWS. *Allen & Unwin. 200 pp. $18.95.*

Reviewed by STEVEN PLAUT

IMAGINE a society with a wide disparity of incomes and wealth; where people in the top 10 percent earn three to six times what people in the bottom 10 percent earn; where poverty is widespread; where women are underpaid and overworked; where the success of children depends greatly on the achievements, class, and ethnicity of their parents; and where "egalitarianism" is officially opposed by the government. A typical capitalist society? The country being described is the Soviet Union two generations after the advent of Bolshevik-style socialism.

Advocates of "collective ownership of the modes of production," that is, centralized economic planning (or—for short—socialism) generally concede that the substitution of bureaucracy for the market mechanism entails serious losses in efficiency. This, they maintain, is a fair trade because the centralized allocation of resources produces an equitable distribution of income, eliminates poverty, and thus creates a superior society. But does it?

The Soviet Union is the oldest centrally planned economy, and if its experience is representative, central economic planning is not only as inefficient as expected, but produces a distribution of material well-being that is no more equitable—if that—than what is obtained under capitalism. The sacrifice of efficiency (and personal freedom) forced upon the citizens of the Soviet Union has bought nothing in exchange. The same relative distribution of well-being achieved there under Communism could have

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been achieved under welfare-state capitalism, and with an overall higher living standard.

This at any rate is the inevitable conclusion that must be drawn from an increasing body of economic and sociological research on income distribution in the Soviet Union. Carrying out such research is anything but easy. In general, obtaining reliable data on the Soviet economy is a difficult task, especially on subjects that are potentially embarrassing. Even Soviet social scientists have been reluctant to explore the patterns of inequality prevailing in the country, and much of what has been done is unpublished. It is for this reason that the few scientific investigations that have been performed are so impressive.

Among these, the most rigorous is the recent book by Alastair McAuley, *Economic Welfare in the Soviet Union*, a comprehensive and objective analysis of Soviet inequality in the post-Stalin era. McAuley relies upon Soviet research, and has also obtained unpublished Soviet data. The portrait he draws is all the more chilling for being presented in a carefully non-political and non-judgmental style.

The picture that emerges, quite different from that painted by official Soviet spokesmen, includes widespread poverty in both rural and urban areas. The Soviets have their own official definition of poverty: in 1967, the standard was a monthly family income equal to 50 rubles per person. This was about $2,600 per year for a family of four, using the official and arbitrary exchange rate, or about $600-800 per year using black-market exchange rates. Whatever the rate used for comparison, the Soviet "minimum material standard" is quite modest compared with Western definitions of poverty.

Yet even with this miserly definition, McAuley concludes that many millions of Soviets live in poverty. He reports that in 1967, between 80 and 85 million out of a total of 233 million Soviet citizens subsisted on incomes below the official poverty level, and some 16 million lived at less than two-thirds of the poverty level. By comparison, the proportion of Americans living officially below the poverty line—now an income of less than $7,450 for a family of four—dropped from 12 percent at the initiation of the Great Society programs to 4 percent today. The Soviet minimum legal wage (widely evaded) is currently about 70 rubles per month, compared with a minimum monthly wage of about $500 in the United States.

Among McAuley's surprising findings is the fact that most of the Soviet poor are not rural, as is commonly believed. Collective farmers do earn about 10 to 15 percent less than the national average, even after adjusting for income in kind from farm produce, and the dispersion of incomes among farmers is greater, but most of the poor are non-agricultural state employees.

Even more interesting is McAuley's documentation of the disparities of income among the various Soviet republics. These disparities are considerably greater than those between the races in the United States. In 1970, five Muslim republics had average incomes below the official poverty level, and two had average incomes more than 20 percent below official poverty levels. Moreover, the inequality among Soviet republics is not diminishing; it actually increased from 1960 to 1970. Far from offsetting the inequality, the government contributes to it, spending less money on the schools and hospitals of the poorer republics.

The unique contributions of this book include detailed analyses of the Soviet welfare state, which is generally regressive (transferring income to the wealthier), and the Soviet system of direct taxation, which is about proportional (non-progressive). While overall incomes in the Soviet Union have risen, McAuley concludes from his study that doubts must be raised about "the extent to which the authorities are committed . . . to radical socialist egalitarianism, to the reduction or elimination of disparities in income, power, and status."

A work by Murray Yanowitch, *So-*

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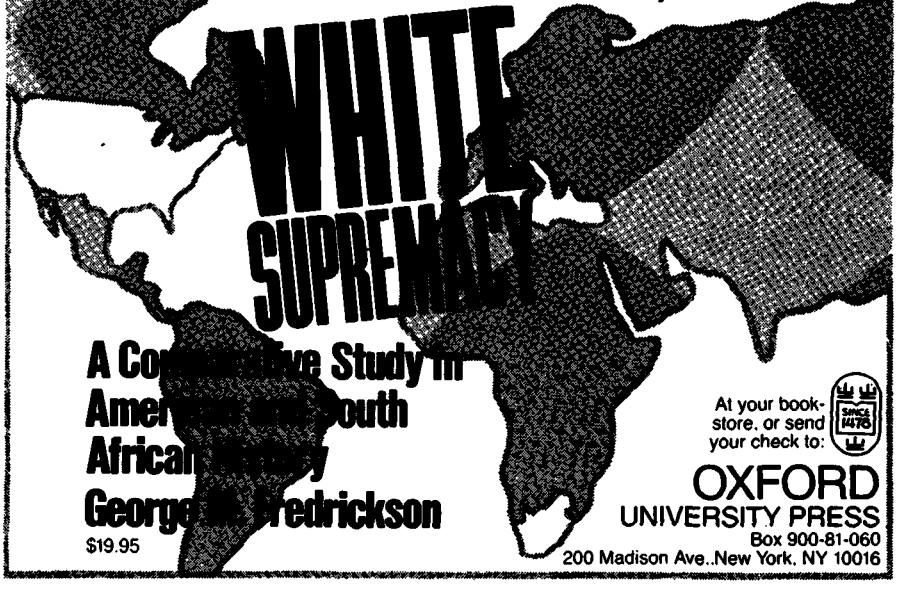

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cial and Economic Inequality in the Soviet Union, augments the findings of McAuley in several ways. Yanowitch takes the discussion back to the time of Stalin, when inequality greatly increased. In fact, "egalitarianism" was denounced in those days as a bourgeois value, and "equality-mongering" was a dangerous act. Even today, he points out, "egalitarianism" is a term invoked with negative overtones by the Soviet media. His numerical estimates of contemporary inequality exceed those of McAuley.

Yanowitch devotes considerable space to questions of social mobility, especially access to schooling. Half the children of parents with low levels of skills drop out of school after eighth grade or go to vocational training schools. For the children of "specialists," by contrast, the proportion of dropouts is 3 percent. Few blue-collar workers and even fewer farmers send their children to college. And when their children apply, they are accepted less often. Half the university students come from families of "specialists," who represent one-seventh of the population. In general, members of the Soviet elite tend to be children of members of the elite —with the curious exception of writers (which may say a lot about "writing" in the Soviet Union).

Yanowitch also explores differences in income and status by sex. Two-thirds of women workers are low skilled, compared with one-fifth of men (as of the late 1960's). Only 4 percent of women are highly skilled, compared with 30 percent of men. Almost all the typists, secretaries, clerks, and telephone operators are women. Only 1 percent of the directors of state farms are women (even though they comprise half the agricultural work force). Women on average earn one-third less than men (about the same pattern as in the United States). Women also do the bulk of the housework, and have longer work days than men.

Both Yanowitch and McAuley take income distribution as representing the distribution of consumption and well-being. This would be a perfectly acceptable way of analyzing Western inequality, where a dollar of income buys a dollar's worth of consumption. As both authors are aware, however, money income in the Soviet Union has limited meaning, since most goods are perpetually in shortage —that is, not obtainable for money. And even when they are obtainable, the "price" of purchase must include the value of time wasted waiting in long lines. Much of the inequality in Soviet society reflects differing degrees of accessibility to goods in shortage. The differences in the severity of shortages between urban and rural areas may exceed income disparities between the two areas. Quantification of these factors is difficult, but the two authors' estimates of inequality are probably on the low side.

For the reasons just cited, any study of Soviet inequality should include a discussion of non-income privileges, and this Mervyn Matthews does in *Privilege in the Soviet Union*. Unlike the rigorous books of Yanowitch and McAuley, however, this is a work devoid of formal methodology, substituting a loose form of journalistic description for economic and sociological analysis. Matthews is particularly loose in describing the tax system, and seems unaware of the economic causes of shortages. Yet his book offers a tasty dessert to the two heavy courses preceding.

Basing himself in large part on interviews with recent emigrants, Matthews describes the restricted stores, the special housing privileges, the access to private cars, special schools, special medical services, foreign travel, pay bonuses, and so forth that are reserved for members of the Soviet elite. Worse yet, these privileges are generally unobtainable even by those whose money is the right color. Money—the great vehicle of social mobility in the West—just cannot buy privilege in the Soviet Union, at least not legally.

Ultimately the Soviet Union has been forced to recognize the essential function that inequality plays in society. Wage differences are the tools according to which workers are allocated by industry and occupation. Where workers are more productive, a higher wage will attract additional manpower and cause total production to rise. When income equalization is forced too far, this allocation efficiency is lost. Increasing social and geographic mobility would make incomes more equal in fact, but it is precisely this mobility that is so restricted in the "workers' paradise." The Soviets have a great deal to learn from the capitalist countries on this score.

Dramatic Tensions

THEATER AND REVOLUTION: THE CULTURE OF THE FRENCH STAGE. By FREDERICK BROWN. *Viking. 490 pp. $20.00.*

Reviewed by STEPHEN MILLER

THE theater has never been an important force in American culture, but in France, as Frederick Brown makes clear in *Theater and Revolution*, things are otherwise. Racine and Molière, France's "classical" playwrights, are dominant cultural figures whose works are read by every French schoolchild. Not only have major French writers, especially in the 20th century, written for the theater, but many French thinkers have pondered the theater's relation to political life. The most influential of these was unquestionably Rousseau, whose *Letter to d'Alembert* Brown rightly regards as a key text, and the inspiration for many of the manifestoes of the French theatrical avant-garde. Finally, French regimes from Louis XIV to Vichy have paid great attention to the theater and tried to shape it to serve their purposes.

Brown's book, broadly speaking, is about the politics of the French theater, especially the tensions between its "official" and "unofficial" forms. As he describes it, the Comédie Française, the state theater, stands on one side of a cultural divide, along with what might be called the middlebrow theaters of 19th-century Paris, which catered to the tastes of the bourgeoisie by serving up the well-made plays of Scribe and Sardou. On the other side of the cultural fence we find the popu-

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lar theater, descended from the *commedia dell'arte*, along with the avant-garde theaters that arose in the early years of the 20th century.

Brown's chronicle begins in 1680, when Louis XIV decreed that the Comédie Française alone had the right to perform spoken plays in the city of Paris. At the same time, the Old Regime was very much aware that this distinguished fare would not suffice for the masses. "The populace must have spectacles," a cabinet minister under Louis XV declared, and so the unofficial theater was permitted to perform, though usually only silent entertainments.

The leaders of the French Revolution also wanted the populace to have spectacles (in French the word means both theater in the narrow sense and anything one goes to see) but the Revolution's spectacles were intended for the edification of the people, not their beguilement. Influenced by Rousseau's guidelines, as expressed in the *Letter to d'Alembert*, Robespierre hoped that the great revolutionary spectacle called the Festival of Unity and Indivisibility, which took place on August 10, 1793, would teach civic virtue to the newly enfranchised masses.

The spectacles of the Revolution had, of course, a brief life. Nineteenth-century Paris saw the growth of the popular theater, which flourished despite the attempts of the two Napoleons to squelch it. (In 1807 Napoleon I issued an edict limiting the number of theaters in Paris to eight, in effect closing down those that served the Paris poor. In 1862 Napoleon III razed most of the popular theaters.) But the popular theater—"a foil," as Brown says, "to classical France"—managed to find ways of starting up again, so great was the demand of the Parisian working classes for entertainment. This "unofficial" theater—a zany mixture of comedy and tragedy, farce and burlesque, all jumbled together—has been immortalized in Marcel Carné's film, *Children of Paradise*. (Paradise was the term for the cheapest seats one could buy, at the very top of the theater.)

Although Brown devotes approximately a third of his book to the popular theater, his argument does not really begin until he focuses on the careers of several turn-of-the-century French avant-garde director-producers who wanted to incorporate elements of the popular theater, especially mime, into a new kind of stagecraft, one with revolutionary implications. Toward the close of the 19th century, the popular theater had come to fascinate an increasing number of intellectuals who despised bourgeois culture in general and especially the culture of the bourgeois stage—the Broadway, as it were, of 19th-century Paris. Enriched by elements from the popular theater, their new stagecraft—so they hoped—would ultimately lead to the development of a "new Frenchman," purged of bourgeois complacency and greed, a Frenchman that Rousseau would have approved of.

Three avant-garde director-producers dominate the last two-thirds of the book—Jacques Copeau, Charles Dullin, and Jean-Louis Barrault—but the central figure for Brown clearly is Copeau. An editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* and a close friend of many distinguished French writers, including André Gide and Roger Martin du Gard, Copeau had originally hoped for a career as a novelist but became increasingly preoccupied with the theater, finally organizing his own company—Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier—in 1913. Copeau was looking for "the essence of theater," as he called it, but his vision, Brown says, "became increasingly despotic" and eventually he turned into a tyrant, "wrecking friendships with imputations of disloyalty . . . isolating himself in every conceivable way from the outside world. . . ."

Although Brown devotes a good deal of space to Copeau's psychology, he seems even more interested in the political implications of Copeau's ambitious plans. In 1918 Copeau told Roger Martin du Gard: "I shall reorganize everything so as to be certain of holding everything in my hands. . . . I DREAM OF INAUGURATING A LITTLE SOCIETY OF CHOSEN CHILDREN WHO WILL BE THE SOURCE OF OUR RENEWAL AND OUR PROMISE." According to Brown,

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Copeau's yearning to be totally in control of his theatrical troupe suggests that, like the other avant-garde director-producers, he was a "ruthless saint" with a vision closely resembling that of a fascist demagogue. Copeau did, in fact, produce an elaborate spectacle in Mussolini's Italy—staging a play about Savonarola in Florence's Piazza della Signoria in 1935. As Brown describes it, "the aesthete provided the demagogue a platform on which to bray melodramatic arias on the New Order, and . . . the demagogue gave formalist aesthetics a national stage."

For Brown, the story of French avant-garde theater offers several ironies. Drawing inspiration from popular French stage productions, avant-garde directors created a theater that was far removed in spirit and aim from what the Parisian masses flocked to. Resolutely opposed both to the official and to the bourgeois theater, the avant-garde directors nevertheless managed during World War II to accommodate themselves to the official theater of the Occupation and Vichy regimes—even working as directors of the Comédie Française for the duration. It was but a short step, it appears, from high-minded opposition to bourgeois culture to high-minded—if uneasy—support of the New Order.

Brown is clearly correct to draw a connection between avant-garde stagecraft and totalitarian politics, for the complicated spectacles which the avant-garde directors liked to stage did indeed prefigure the mass rallies staged by Mussolini and Hitler. Yet in some respects Brown's argument is not wholly convincing. For one thing, not all of the theater's "ruthless saints" were Frenchmen; in the early 20th century most serious directors in other countries were also experimenting with new forms of stagecraft, radically different from the conventional theater. These experiments crossed political boundaries, and not all avant-garde directors were sympathetic to a new order—whether of the Left or of the Right.

It may be misleading to suggest, moreover, that the personal despotism of a man like Copeau is necessarily analogous to political despotism; the authoritarianism—even megalomania—of a theatrical artist may be the only way to get a troupe to work in a coherent fashion. The best directors, like the best conductors or football coaches, are often despots.

Finally, Brown may be too literal in his understanding of the anti-bourgeois rhetoric of the early 20th-century stage manifestoes. Such rhetoric, the cant of the day, permeated the intellectual culture; the "dream of a commune that will merge individual destinies"—to quote Brown—was a dream that entranced many writers as well as stage directors (Ruskin, Eliot, and Henry Adams, to name only a few), and its relation to radical politics of whatever stripe is more problematical than Brown allows.

But if Brown has not fully refined his argument, he has raised some important and disturbing questions. And, aside from its argument, his book is a mine of information about French theatrical culture, most of it very absorbing.

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Priest of Art

LECTURES ON LITERATURE. By VLADIMIR NABOKOV. *Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 385 pp. $19.95.*

Reviewed by JEFFREY MEYERS

The novelist Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977), self-exiled from Russia at the age of twenty, was—with Einstein and Mann, Huxley and Auden, Stravinsky and Milhaud—part of the great cultural emigration that came to America during the rise of Nazism. Nabokov arrived in New York in 1940 and soon began his progress from lean lecturer to full professor. During 1941-48 he taught Russian language and literature at Wellesley and worked as a Research Fellow in Entomology (specializing in butterflies) at Harvard. From 1948 to 1959 he was a member of the Russian Department at Cornell and lectured on Masters of European Fiction. As a teacher, Nabokov combined the precision and patience of the scientist with the passion and pity of the artist. *Lectures on Literature* is a handsome book, expertly edited and introduced, and profusely illustrated with his sketches, charts, and manuscripts.

Nabokov's turbulent background determined his attitude toward literature. Like Joseph Conrad, he was born into an upper-class family in Slavic Europe, suffered exile and hardship when his father's political career ended in personal disaster. Nabokov's grandfather was Minister of Justice under Czar Alexander II when the Russian government suppressed the Polish rebellion of 1863 and sent Conrad's family into arctic exile. Nabokov's father, a Constitutional Democrat who was also on the losing side of a revolution, was murdered in Berlin in 1922. Both Conrad and Nabokov were polylingual, lived in Western Europe before moving to an English-speaking country, and

JEFFREY MEYERS *has written fifteen books on modern literature including several works on T. E. Lawrence and George Orwell, a life of Katherine Mansfield, and* The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis, *to be published in America this year by Routledge & Kegan Paul.*

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adopted English as their literary language. Both had a distinguished *hauteur* and were deeply conservative: Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* satirized the revolutionaries who would later drive Nabokov out of Russia. Both brought a distinctive alien vision to English literature and were slow to achieve artistic recognition.

Though Nabokov insisted that "None of my [examination] questions ever presupposed the advocacy of a fashionable interpretation or critical view that a teacher might wish to promote," his strong opinions are expressed with dogmatic persistency. His view of literature, like that of Proust and Joyce, derives from Flaubert's belief that "like God in His world, so the author in his book should be nowhere and everywhere, invisible and omnipresent." He defines art as "beauty plus pity," worships it as "the essential reality of life," insists that it must deliberately exclude the actual world, and believes it survives all social and political change. He is primarily interested in the novel as "mimetic magic or deceptive doubleness," as an intricate and entirely self-contained mechanism whose style and structure lend themselves to precise and visualized "detective investigation": "I endeavored to provide students of literature with exact information about [realistic] details, about such combinations of details as yield the sensual spark without which a book is dead." His lectures are thus filled with useful maps, plans, drawings, and diagrams of towns, houses, characters, and plot.

The radical limitations of this approach have been largely ignored by the schoolgirl gush of recent reviews. Yet Nabokov, who concentrates on plot rather than meaning ("General ideas were anathema" to him), ignores the author's biography ("I am not one to go heavily for the human interest stuff"), the historical background ("child labor and all that"), the intellectual milieu ("great novels are great fairy tales"), the literary influence, the author's development. He teaches the novels in a vacuum, believing that "A work of art has no importance whatever to society."

Nabokov has many fierce prejudices, which he pronounces *ex cathedra*, and persuades his students, unable to challenge the Russian icon, to adopt his views about authors they have not yet read. He dislikes and dismisses Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Lawrence, Faulkner, and Hemingway; calls Mann a dwarf or plaster saint; and refers to Freud as "the Viennese witch doctor." Despite the encouragement of his friend Edmund Wilson (who did not share Nabokov's enthusiasm for Robert Louis Stevenson), Nabokov is not responsive to Jane Austen and misses a good deal of her irony, satire, and wit—as well as the sadness in Proust and the comedy in Joyce.

The lectures, carefully prepared and elegantly wrought, have a curiously static quality (like butterflies fixed in a case) and remained unchanged for twenty academic years. Once Nabokov worked out his ideas, he never felt the need to reexamine them. The constant emphasis on style and structure leads him to treat a sequence of very different novels, written from 1813 to 1922, in the same, somewhat mechanical way.

These significant limitations did not prevent Nabokov from being a funny, flamboyant, and formidable undergraduate teacher. His regal demeanor, handsome features, aristocratic manners, superb acting, rich Russian-French intonation, eccentric personality, idiosyncratic ideas, sophisticated wit, enthusiasm for literature and artistic achievement all made a profound and permanent impression on his students. At Wellesley, when his lecture was over, some bright devotees demanded: " 'We want to hear it over again. We want to hear more.' He smiled, pleased, but gathered up his papers and gently departed." He was painfully aware of the impassable gulf between his own subtle mind, exotic background, and traumatic experience and that of his lively but essentially naive pupils.

NABOKOV is weakest on Jane Austen and Dickens, most original on Stevenson and Kafka. He regards *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as a phenomenon of style (though it is frequently melodramatic and overwritten) which makes the crucial transformation "have the impact of satisfactory and artistic reality." He

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The new President won the election, according to the comments of the people coming out of the precinct booths, on the hope that he would arrest inflation. The Federal Reserve System has been trying to control inflation through its fiscal policies for the past 20 years. The cost has been tremendous in high interest rates to business and consumer running from 13% to 18%.

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calls Hyde Jekyll's parasite—could there be something of the Stevenson/Henry James (Hyde/Jekyll) relationship portrayed in this story, which Stevenson wrote, while recovering from a hemorrhage, at the height of their intimacy? Nabokov subtly suggests that Jekyll's "secret adventures were homosexual." If so, Hyde's fangs and claws must have made very rough trade indeed, and reversed Freud's dictum: "Where id was there shall ego be."

Nabokov makes brilliant use of his entomological expertise in the lecture on Kafka and provides a detailed drawing and description of Gregor Samsa (who is not a cockroach). Despite this specificity, however, Nabokov fails to explain how an entire apple, thrown by Gregor's father, becomes embedded in his beetle flesh. He notes that Gregor's wing case concealed little wings and that Gregor never realized that he could have flown out the window to freedom. This observation is clever but irrelevant. For Gregor's outer form reflects his psychic condition (as the face expresses the soul in Renaissance neo-Platonism) and cannot be escaped. Nabokov rightly says the metamorphosis is not complete until Gregor abandons his human memories; but he can never do this because (like Odysseus's men transformed into swine by Circe) he retains his human sensitivity and perceives his own tragedy.

The weaknesses of Nabokov's method—he is primarily interested in the pattern of recurring themes and the synchronization of events—appear most clearly in the disappointing chapter on *Ulysses*, the most difficult novel to teach. But Nabokov is an excellent literary detective. He convincingly concludes that the mysterious man in the macintosh, who reappears throughout the novel, is in fact James Joyce himself. And he rightly states that the journalistic style in Aeolus and the convoluted theory about Shakespeare in Scylla and Charybdis are both tedious, and that the "petrified superpun" *Finnegans Wake* is "one of the greatest failures in literature."

It is ironic that Nabokov's course was sometimes known as "Dirty Lit." (a title inherited from his predecessor), for the future author of *Lolita*, which was banned after publication in France in 1955, is rather squeamish and evasive about Joyce's hilarious scatological details and Bloom's obsessive sexual fantasies (a rich theme that connects the artistic nature of Bloom and Stephen). Nor does Nabokov give nearly enough attention to the fact that Bloom (like Mann's Joseph, Kafka's Gregor, and Proust's Swann) is Jewish, and reflects the intellectual influence of Marx, Freud, and Einstein on the thought of the modern age. As Freud wrote, alluding to Ibsen: "Because I was a Jew. . . I was prepared to join the opposition and to do without agreement with the 'compact majority.'" Joyce was influenced, in his creation of Bloom, by his friendship with the Triestino-Jewish novelist Italo Svevo and by Victor Bérard's theory of the Semitic origins of Odysseus, which matched Joyce's belief: "Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet." Bloom, constantly subjected to anti-Semitism ("When in doubt persecute Bloom"), and treated with irony and compassion, is, like his Homeric prototype, an exiled and lonely wanderer. He is drawn to Palestine as Molly is to Gibraltar and Odysseus to Ithaca. But Bloom, the last of his line, is cut off from both father and son as well as from religion, national origins, and ancient homeland.

Though Nabokov minimized his own debt to Proust and Joyce, he was profoundly influenced by both of them. Nabokov found the kernel of the Humbert-Lolita relationship in Bloom's fantastic infatuation with the dreamy adolescent Gerty MacDowell in the Nausicaa chapter of *Ulysses*. Like Joyce, Nabokov loves wit, puns, word play, parody, puzzles, obscure multilingual allusions, and stylistic fireworks. Neither Nabokov nor Edmund Wilson noticed, as Wyndham Lewis did in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), that the style of Joyce's interior monologue derived from the disconnected thoughts of Mr. Jingle in Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers*.

Nabokov's *Lectures on Literature*, though no one knew it at the time, was also a course on how to read his own novels, for he remarks that "every new type of writer evolves a new type of reader." His Russian novels are generally weaker than his novels in English; and his reputation rests primarily on *Lolita*, *Pnin* (1957), and *Pale Fire* (1962)—the last two academic novels with a Cornell setting—which were written during his mature years. Though these are major achievements, they have the same limitations as his lectures and do not equal the greatest postwar novels: Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, Lewis's *Self Condemned*, and Giuseppe Lampedusa's *The Leopard*. When Nabokov finally achieved wealth and fame with the publication of the New York edition of *Lolita* in 1958, he left teaching and returned to Switzerland where, Scott Fitzgerald observed, "few things begin and many things end." He lived in the luxurious Montreux Palace Hotel from 1961 on, wrote *Ada* (1969) and *Transparent Things* (1972), and died there in 1977.

NABOKOV's choice of novels for his lectures was more personal than literary, for they comprise a mosaic history of his own life. Jane Austen's stable society of country gentlefolk represents Nabokov's childhood before the Russian Revolution; Stevenson and Kafka describe a radically negative transformation that occurred after the Revolution; Dickens portrays impotent youth deprived of its rightful inheritance; Joyce writes of the life of an exile and wanderer; Flaubert symbolizes the passionate dedication to art that outlasts political upheaval; and Proust, like Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*, concerns the attempt to recapture the past. Indeed, Nabokov's description of his master Marcel Proust applies with equal force to his own work: "The transmutation of sensation into sentiment, the ebb and tide of memory, waves of emotion such as desire, jealousy, and artistic euphoria—this is the material of the enormous and yet singularly light and translucid work."

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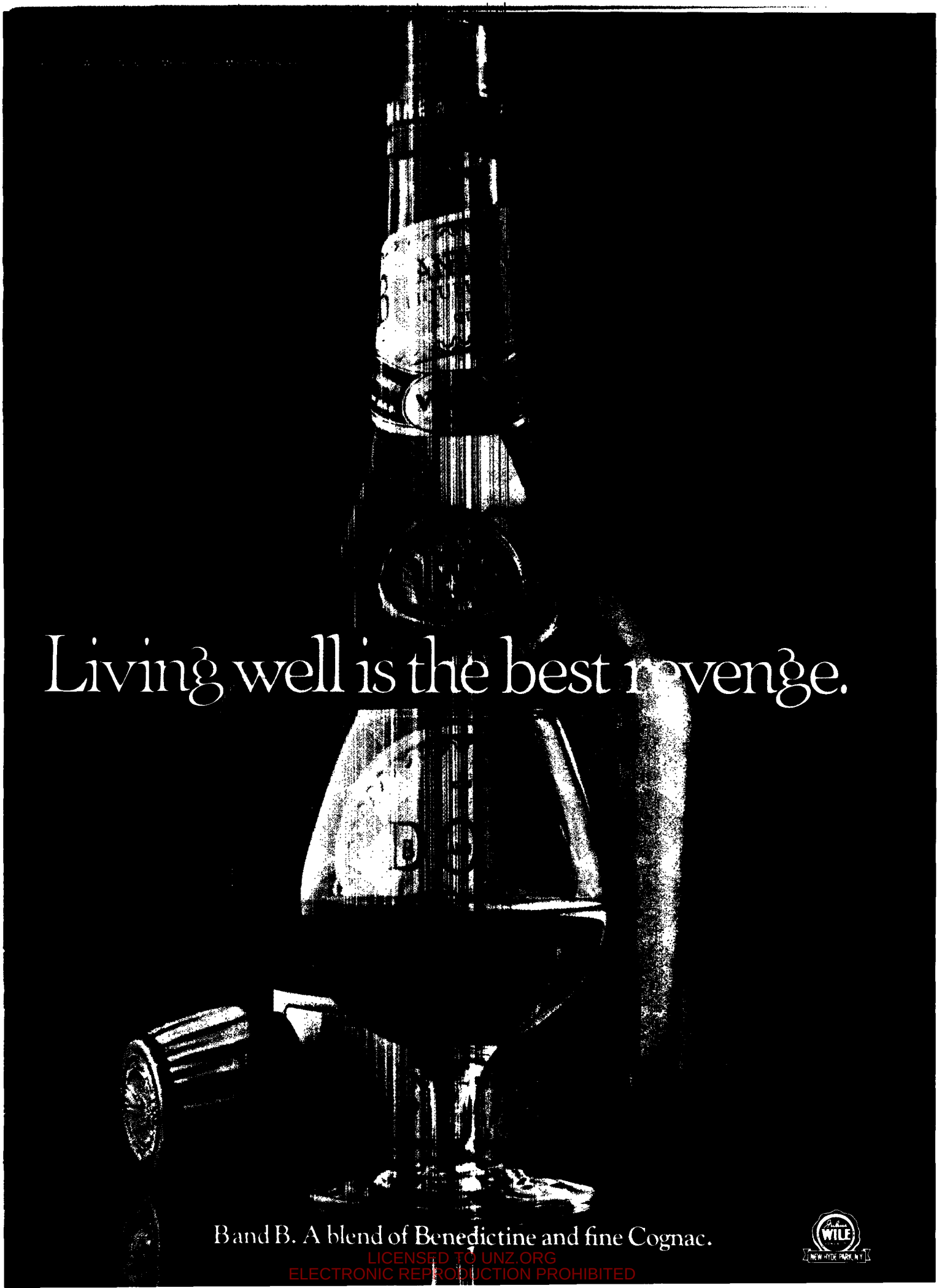

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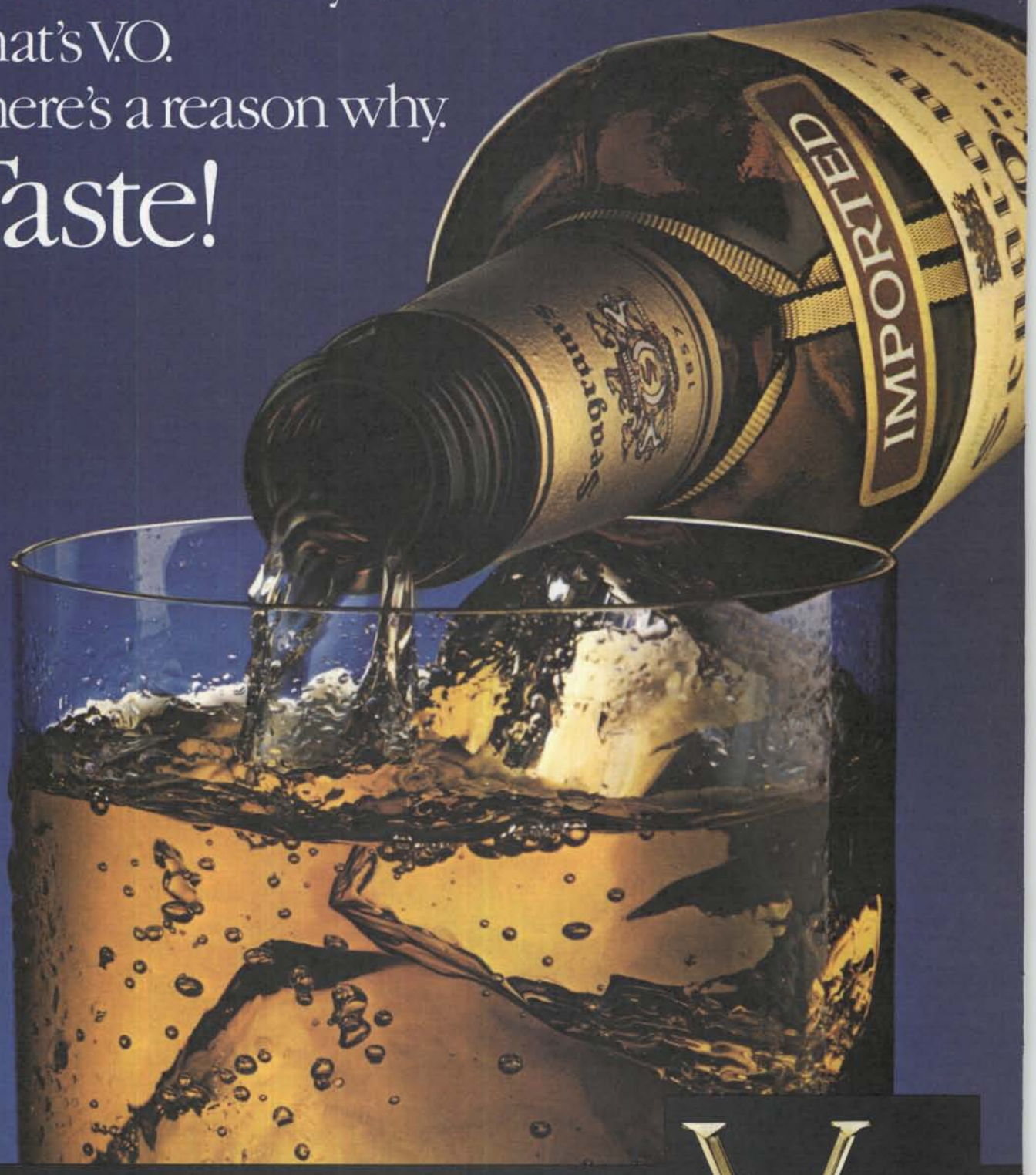

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